

# Amadeo Bordiga Archive



1889-1970

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Amadeo Bordiga May 1919

# The System of Communist Representation

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In launching our communist programme, which contained the outlines of a response to many vital problems concerning the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, we expected to see a broad discussion develop on all its aspects. Instead there has been and still is only furious discussion over the incompatibility of electoral participation, which is soberly affirmed in the programme. Indeed, although the electionist maximalists proclaim that for them electoral action is quite secondary, they are in fact so mesmerized by it as to launch an avalanche of articles against the few anti-electionist lines contained in our programme. On our side, apart from the ample treatment given in these columns to the reasons underlying our abstentionism, we have only now begun to use *Avanti!* as a platform to reply to this deluge of electoralist objections.

Hence we are delighted to note that the Turin newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* is demanding clarification of the paragraph in the communist programme which states: "Elections to local workers' councils will be held *flog in accordance with the trades go which they belong, but on an urban and provincial constituency basis*:". The writer, Comrade Andrea Viglongo, asks whether this was a way of denying that the power of the Soviets should derive from the masses consulted and voting at *the very place where they work*: in the factories, workshops, mines and villages.

What the drafters of the programme had in mind was as follows. The Soviet system is a system of *political* representation of the working class; its fundamental characteristic is denial of the right to vote to anyone who is not a member of the proletariat. It has been thought that Soviets and economic unions were the same thing. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. It may well be that in various countries, in early stages of the revolution, Soviet-type bodies were set up with representation from the craft unions - but this was no more than a makeshift arrangement.

While the trade union has as its object the defence of the sectional interests of the worker in so far as he belongs to a given trade or industry, the proletarian figures w. the Soviet as a

member of a social class that has conquered political power and is running society, in so far as his interests have something in common with all workers of any trade whatsoever. What we have in the central Soviet is a political representation of the working class, with deputies representing local constituencies. National representatives of the various trades have no place in this schema at all; this should suffice to give the lie simultaneously to trade-unionist interpretations and to the reformist parody of hypothetical constituent assemblies of trades masquerading as Soviet-type institutions.

But the question remains, how should the network of representation be fashioned in the case of local urban or rural village Soviets? If we refer to the Russian system, as expounded in Articles XI, XII, XIII and XIV of the Constitution of the Soviet Republic, we may conclude that the essential feature is that in the cities there is one delegate for every 1,000 inhabitants, and in the countryside one for every 100 inhabitants, elections being held (Art. 66) in accordance with rules established by the local Soviets. So it is not the case that the number of delegates to be elected depends on how many factories or workplaces there are; and we are not told whether the election involves assembling all the electors with the right to a representative, or what the norms should be. But if we refer to the programmes of communists in other countries, it would seem safe to conclude that the nature of the electoral units is not the basic problem of the Soviet order, even though it gives rise to some important considerations.

The network of Soviets undoubtedly has a dual nature: political and revolutionary on the one hand; economic and constructive on the other. The first aspect is dominant in the early stages, but as the expropriation of the bourgeoisie proceeds, it gradually cedes in importance to the second. Necessity will gradually refine the bodies which are technically competent to fulfil this second function: forms of representation of trade categories and production units will emerge and connect with one another, especially as regards technique and work discipline. But the fundamental political role of the network of workers' councils is based on the historical concept of dictatorship: proletarian interests must be allowed free play in so far as they concern *the whole class over and above sectional interests, and the whole of the historical development of the movement for its emancipation*. The conditions needed to accomplish *all* these are basically: 1. the exclusion of the bourgeois from any participation in political activity; 2. the convenient distribution of electors into local constituencies which send delegates to the Congress of Soviets. This body then appoints the Central Executive Committee, and has the task of promulgating the decisions regarding the gradual socialization of the various sectors of the economy.

Seen in relation to this historical definition of the communist representative system, it seems to us that *L'Ordine Nuovo* slightly exaggerates the *formal* definition of the way the representative bodies intermesh. Which groupings do the voting and where is not a substantive problem: various solutions at a national and regional level can be accommodated.

Only up to a certain point can the factory internal commissions be seen as the precursors of Soviets. We prefer to think of them as precursors of the factory councils, which will have technical and disciplinary duties both during and after the socialization of the factory itself. We should be clear that the civilian political Soviet will be elected wherever convenient, and most probably on the basis of constituencies that are not very different from present electoral seats.

The electoral rolls themselves will have to be different. Viglongo poses the question whether all the workers in the factory should have the right to vote, or just the trade-union members. We would ask him to consider whether some workers, even members of a trade union, should be struck off the electoral roll of the civilian political Soviet where it is found that, in addition to working in a factory, they live on the proceeds from a small capital sum or annuity. This is a not uncommon occurrence amongst us. Again the Russian Constitution clearly takes this into account in the first sentence of Art. 65. Finally the legitimately unemployed and incapacitated must also have a vote.

What characterizes the communist system then is the definition of the right to be an elector, a right which depends not on one's membership of a particular trade, but on the extent to which the individual, in the totality of his social relations, can be seen as a proletarian with an interest in the rapid achievement of communism, or a non-proletarian tied in some way or other to the preservation of the economic relations of private property. This extremely simple condition guarantees the political workability of the Soviet system of representation. In parallel to this system, new and technically competent techno-economic bodies will emerge. They must, however, remain subordinate to whatever the Soviets lay down in terms of broad policy guidelines; for until classes are totally abolished, only the political system of representation will embody the collective interests of the proletariat, acting as the prime accelerator of the revolutionary process. On another occasion we shall discuss the problem whether it is possible or desirable to set up political Soviets even before the revolutionary battle for the conquest of power takes place.

Amadeo Bordiga May 1919

# Is this the Time to form “Soviets”?

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Two of the articles in our last issue, one devoted to an analysis of the communist system of representation and the other to an exposition of the current tasks facing our Party, concluded by asking whether it is possible or appropriate to set up workers' and peasants' councils today, while the power of the bourgeoisie is still intact. Comrade Ettore Croce, in a discussion of our abstentionist thesis in an article in *Avanti!*, asks that we should have a new weapon at the ready before getting rid of the old weapon of parliamentary action and looks forward to the formation of Soviets.

In our last issue we clarified the distinction between the technical-economic and political tasks of the Soviet representative bodies, and we showed that the true organs of the proletarian dictatorship are the local and central political Soviets, in which workers are not sub-divided according to their particular trade. The supreme authority of these organs is the Central Executive Committee, which nominates the People's Commissars; parallel to them, there arises a whole network of economic organs, based on factory councils and trade unions, which culminate in the Central Council of the Economy.

In Russia, we repeat, whereas there is no trade representation in the CEC and Soviet of Soviets, but only territorial representation, this is not the case as regards the Council of the Economy, the organ which is responsible for the technical implementation of the socialization measures decreed by the political assembly. In this Council, trade federations and local economic councils play a role. The 16 August issue of *L'Ordine Nuovo* contained an interesting article on the Soviet-type system of socialization. This article explained how in a first stage, dubbed anarcho-syndicalist, the factory councils would take over the management of production, but that subsequently, in later stages involving centralization, they would lose importance. In the end they would be nothing more than clubs and mutual benefit and instruction societies for the workers in a particular factory.

If we shift our attention to the German communist movement, we see in the programme of the

Spartacus League that the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, the bodies which are to take the place of the bourgeois parliaments and municipal councils, are quite different from factory councils, which (Art. 7 of Section III) *regulates working conditions and control production, in agreement with the workers' councils, and eventually take over the management of the whole enterprise.*

In Russian practice, factory management was made up to the extent of only one-third by representatives from the factory council, one-third by representatives from the Supreme Council of the Economy, and one-third by representatives from the Central Federation of Industry (the interests of the work-force, the general interests of society, and the interests of the particular industrial sector).

In Germany again, elections to the Workers' Councils are arranged in accordance with the formula: one council member to every 1,000 electors. Only the large factories with over 1,000 workers constitute a single electoral unit; in the case of small factories and the unemployed, voting takes place in accordance with methods established by the electoral commission in agreement with various trade organizations.

It seems to us that we have marshalled enough evidence here to be able to declare ourselves supporters of a system of representation that is clearly divided into two divisions: economic and political. As far as economic functions are concerned, each factory will have its own factory council elected by the workers; this will have a part to play in the socialization and subsequent management of the plant in accordance with suitable criteria. As far as the political function is concerned, that is to say the formation of local and central organs of authority, elections to proletarian councils will be held on the basis of electoral rolls in which (with the rigorous exclusion of all bourgeois, i.e. people who in any way whatsoever live off the work of others) all proletarians are included on an equal footing, irrespective of their trade, and even if they are (legitimately) unemployed or incapacitated. Bearing all this in mind, is it possible, or desirable, to set up Soviets now?

If we are speaking of factory councils, these are already spreading in the form of internal commissions, or the English "shop stewards" system. As these are organs which represent the interests of the work-force, they should be set up even while the factory is still in the hands of private capital. Indeed it would certainly be to our advantage to urge the setting up of these factory councils, although we should entertain no illusions as to their innate revolutionary capacity. Which brings us to the most important problem, that of political Soviets. The political Soviet represents the collective interests of the working class, in so far as this class does not share power with the bourgeoisie, but has succeeded in overthrowing it and excluding it from power. Hence the full significance and strength of the Soviet lies not in this or that structure, but in the fact that it is the organ of a class which is taking the management of society into its own hands. Every member of the Soviet is a proletarian conscious that he is exercising dictatorship in

the name of his own class.

If the bourgeois class is still in power, even if it were possible to summon proletarian electors to nominate their delegates (for there is no question of using the trade unions or existing internal commissions for the purpose), one would simply be giving a formal imitation of a future activity, an imitation devoid of its fundamental revolutionary character. Those who can represent the proletariat *today*, before it takes power *tomorrow*, are workers who are conscious of this historical eventuality; in other words, the workers who are *members of the Communist Party*.

In its struggle against bourgeois power, the proletariat is represented by its *class party*, even if this consists of no more than an audacious minority. The Soviets of tomorrow must arise from the local branches or the Communist Party. It is these which will be able to call on elements who, as soon as the revolution is victorious, will be proposed as candidates before the proletarian electoral masses to set up the Councils of local worker delegates.

But if it is to fulfil these functions, the Communist Party *must abandon its participation in elections to organs of bourgeois democracy*. The reasons supporting this statement are obvious. The Party should have as members only those individuals who can cope with the responsibilities and dangers of the struggle during the period of insurrection and social reorganization. The conclusion that we should abandon our participation in elections only when we have Soviets available is mistaken. A more thorough examination of the question leads one instead to the following conclusion: for as long as bourgeois power exists, the organ of revolution is the class party; after the smashing of bourgeois power, it is the network of workers' councils. The class party cannot fulfil this role, nor be in a position to lead the assault against bourgeois power in order to replace parliamentary democracy by the Soviet system, unless it renounces the practice of despatching its own representatives to bourgeois organs. This renunciation, which is negative only in a formal sense, is the prime condition to be satisfied if the forces of the communist proletariat are to be mobilized. To be unwilling to make such a renunciation is tantamount to abandoning our posture of readiness to declare class war at the first available opportunity.



Amadeo Bordiga May 1920

# Letters to the IIIrd International

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## I

Abstentionist Communist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party  
Central Committee  
Borgo San Antonio Abate 221  
Naples

To the Moscow Committee of the IIIrd International.

Our fraction was formed after the Bologna Congress of the Italian Socialist Party (6-10 October 1919), but it had issued its propaganda previously through the Naples newspaper *Il Soviet*, convening a conference at Rome which approved the programme subsequently presented to the Congress. We enclose a collection of issues of the journal, plus several copies of the programme together with the motion with which it was put to the vote.

It should be noted at the outset that throughout the war years a powerful extremist movement operated within the Party, opposing both the openly reformist politics of the parliamentary group and the General Confederation of Labour and also those of the Party leadership, despite the fact that they followed an intransigent revolutionary line in accordance with the decisions of the pre-War congresses. The leadership has always been split into two currents *vis-à-vis* the problem of the War. The right-wing current identified itself with Lazzari, author of the formula "neither support nor sabotage the war", the left-wing current with Serrati, the editor of *Avanti!*. However, the two currents presented a united front at all meetings held during the war, and although they had reservations concerning the attitude of the parliamentary group, they did not come out firmly against them. Left elements outside the leadership struggled against this ambiguity, being determined to split the reformists of the group away from the Party and not even the 1918 Congress of Rome, held just before the Armistice, to adopt a more revolutionary

attitude, was able to break with the transigent politics of the deputies. The leadership, despite the addition of extremist elements like Gennari and Bombacci, did not effect much change in its line; indeed, this was weakened by a soft attitude towards some of the activities of a right wing hostile to the orientation of the majority of the Party.

After the war, apparently the whole Party adopted a "maximalist" line, affiliating to the IIIrd International. However, from a communist point of view, the Party's attitude was not satisfactory; we beg you to note the polemics published in *II Soviet* taking issue with the parliamentary group, the Confederation (in connection with the "constituent assembly of trades") and with the leadership itself, in particular concerning the preparations for the 20-21 July strike. Together with other comrades from all over Italy, we at once opted our electoral abstentionism, which we supported at the Bologna Congress. *We wish to make it clear that at the congress we were at variance with the Party not only on the electoral question, but also on the question of splitting the Party.*

The victorious "maximalist electionist" faction too had accepted the thesis that the reformists were incompatible with the Party, but failed to act on it for purely *electoral* calculations - notwithstanding the anti-communist speeches of Turati and Treves. This is a powerful argument in favour of abstentionism: *unless electionist and parliamentary activity is abandoned, It will not be possible to form a purely Communist Party.*

Parliamentary democracy in the Western countries assumes forms of such a character that it constitutes the most formidable weapon for deflecting the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. The left in our Party has been committed to polemicizing and struggling against bourgeois democracy since 1910-11, and this experience leads us to the conclusion that in the present world revolutionary situation, all contact with the democratic system needs to be severed.

The present situation in Italy is as follows: the Party is waging a campaign against the war and the interventionist parties, certain of deriving great electoral advantages from this policy. But since the present government is composed of bourgeois parties which were hostile to the war in 1915, a certain confluence results between the Party's electoral activity and the politics of the bourgeois government. As all the reformist ex-deputies have been readopted as candidates, the Nitti government, which has good relations with them as may be seen from the most recent parliamentary episodes, will trim its behaviour to ensure that they are preferred. Then the Party, exhausted as it is by the enormous efforts it has made in the present elections, will become bogged down in polemics against the transigent attitude of the deputies. Then we will have the preparations for the administrative elections in July 1920; for many months, the Party will make no serious revolutionary propaganda or preparations. It is to be hoped that unforeseen developments do not intervene and overwhelm the Party. We attach importance to the question of electoral activity, and we feel it is contrary to communist principles to allow individual

parties affiliated to the IIIrd International to decide the question for themselves. The international communist party should study the problem and resolve it for everyone.

Today we are resolved to work towards the formation of a truly communist party, and our fraction inside the Italian Socialist Party has set itself this goal. We hope that the first parliamentary skirmishes will bring many comrades towards us, so that the split with the social.-democrats may be accomplished. At the congress, we received 3,417 votes (67 sections voting for us), while the maximalist electionists won with 48,000 votes and the reformists received 14,000. We are also at variance with the maximalists on other issues of principle: in the interests of brevity we enclose a copy of the programme adopted by the congress, which is the Party's programme today (not one member left the Party as a result of the changes in the programme), together with some comments of our own.

It should be noted that we are not collaborating with movements outside the Party, such as anarchists and syndicalists, for they follow principles which are non-communist and contrary to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Indeed, they accuse us of being more authoritarian and centralist than the other maximalists in the Party. See the polemics in *II Soviet*. What is needed in Italy is a comprehensive clarification of the communist programme and tactics, and we will devote all our efforts to this end. Unless a party that concerns itself solely and systematically with propagandizing and preparing the proletariat along communist lines is successfully organized, the revolution could emerge defeated.

As far as the question of tactics is concerned, in particular the setting up of Soviets, it appears to us that errors are being committed even by our friends; what we are afraid of is that nothing more will be accomplished than to give a reformist twist to the craft unions. Efforts are in fact being made to set up workshop committees, as in Turin, and then to bring all the delegates from a given industry (engineering) together to take over the leadership of the trade union, by appointing its executive committee. In this way, the political functions of the workers' councils for which the proletariat should be prepared are not being tackled; whereas, in our view, the most important problem is to organize a powerful class-based party (Communist Party) that will prepare the insurrectionary seizure of power from the hands of the bourgeois government.

It is our earnest desire to know your opinion concerning: (a) parliamentary and municipal electionism and the prospects for a decision on this question by the Communist International; (b) splitting the Italian party; (c) the tactical problem of setting up Soviets under a bourgeois regime, and the limits of such action.

We salute both yourselves and the great Russian proletariat, the pioneer of universal communism.

*Naples, 10 November 1919.*

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## II

Abstentionist Communist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party  
Central Committee  
Borgo San Antonio Abate 221  
Naples 11 January 1920

To the Central Committee of the Communist IIIrd International, Moscow.

Dearest Comrades,

We sent you a previous communication on 11 November. We are Writing in Italian in the knowledge that your office is run by Comrade Balabanov, who has an excellent knowledge of the language.

Our movement is made up of those who voted in favour of the abstentionist tendency at the Bologna congress. We are again sending you our programme and its accompanying motion. We hope you received the collection of our newspaper *II Soviet*, and this time we are sending you copies of Numbers 1 and 2 of the new series which began this year. The object of this letter is to let you have some comments of ours on Comrade Lenin's letter to the German communists, published by *Rote Fahne* on 20 December 1919 and reproduced by *Avanti!* on the 31st, to give you a clearer idea of our political position.

First of all, let us draw your attention once again to the fact that the Italian Socialist Party still contains opportunist socialists of the Adler and Kautsky ilk, of whom Lenin speaks in the first part of his letter. The Italian party is not a communist party; *It is not even a revolutionary party*. The "maximalist electionist" majority is closer in spirit to the German Independents. At the congress we differentiated ourselves from this majority *not only on the issue of electoral tactics*, but also on the question of excluding the reformists led by Turati from the party. Hence the division between ourselves and those maximalists who voted in favour of Serrati's motion at Bologna is not analogous to the division between the supporters of abstentionism and the supporters of electoral participation within the German Communist Party, *but corresponds rather to the division between Communists and independents*.

In programmatic terms our point of view has nothing In common with anarchism and syndicalism. We favour the strong and centralized Marxist political party that Lenin speaks of. Indeed we are the most fervent supporters of this idea in the maximalist camp. We are not In favour of boycotting economic trade unions but of communists taking them over, and our position corresponds to that expressed by comrade Zinoviev in his report to the Congress of the

Russian Communist Party, published by *Avanti!* on 1 January.

As for the *workers' councils*, these exist in only a few places in Italy and then they are exclusively factory councils, made up of workshop delegates who are concerned with questions internal to the factory. Our proposal, on the other hand, is to take the initiative in setting up rural and municipal Soviets, elected directly by the masses assembled in the factories or villages; for we believe that in preparing for the revolution, the struggle should have a predominantly political character. We are in favour of participating in elections to any representative body of the working class when the electorate consists exclusively of workers. On the other hand, we are against the participation of communists in elections for parliaments, or bourgeois municipal and provincial councils, or constituent assemblies, because we are of the opinion that it is not possible to carry out revolutionary work in such bodies; we believe that electoral work is an obstacle in the path of the Working masses, forming a communist consciousness and laying the preparations for the proletarian dictatorship as the antithesis of bourgeois democracy.

To participate in such bodies and expect to emerge unscathed by social-democratic and collaborationist deviations is a vain hope in the current historical period, as is shown by the present Italian parliamentary session. These conclusions are reinforced by the experience of the struggle waged by the left wing in our Party from 1910-11 to the present day against all the manoeuvres of parliamentarism, in a country which has supported a bourgeois democratic regime for a long time: the campaign against ministerialism; against forming electoral political and administrative alliance with democratic parties; against freemasonry and bourgeois anticlericalism, etc. From this experience we drew the conclusion that the gravest danger for the socialist revolution lies in collaborating with bourgeois democracy on the terrain of social reformism. This experience was subsequently generalized in the course of the war and the revolutionary events in Russia, Germany, Hungary, etc.

Parliamentary intransigence was a practical proposition, despite continual clashes and difficulties, in a non-revolutionary period, when the conquest of power on the part of the working class did not seem very likely. In addition, the more the regime and the composition of parliament itself have a traditional democratic character, the greater become the difficulties of parliamentary action. It is with these points in mind that we would judge the comparisons with the Bolsheviks' participation in elections to the Duma after 1905. The tactic employed by the Russian comrades, of participating in elections to the Constituent Assembly and then dissolving it by force, despite the fact that it did not prove to be the undoing of the revolution, would be a dangerous tactic to use in countries where the parliamentary system, far from being a recent phenomenon, is an institution of long standing and one that is rooted firmly in the consciousness and customs of the proletariat itself.

The work required to gain the support of the masses for the abolition of the system of democratic representation would appear to be - and is in fact - a much greater task for us in Italy

than in, say, Russia or even Germany. The need to give the greatest force to this propaganda aimed at devaluing the parliamentary institution and eliminating its sinister counter-revolutionary influence has led us to the tactic of abstentionism. To electoral activity we counterpose the violent conquest of political power on the part of the proletariat and the formation of the Council State: hence our abstentionism in no way diminishes our insistence on the need for a centralized revolutionary government. Indeed, we are against collaborating with anarchists and syndicalists within the revolutionary movement, for they do not accept such criteria of propaganda and action.

The general election of 16 November, despite the fact that it was fought by the PSI on a maximalist platform, has proved once again that electoral activity excludes and pushes into the background every other form of activity, above all illegal activity. In Italy the problem is not one of uniting legal and illegal activity, as Lenin advises the German comrades, but of beginning to reduce *legal* activity in order to make a start on its *illegal* counterpart, which does not exist at all. The new parliamentary group has devoted itself to social-democratic and minimalist work, tabling questions, drafting legislation, etc.

We conclude our exposition by letting you know that in all likelihood, although We have maintained discipline within the PSI and upheld its tactics until now, before long and perhaps prior to the municipal elections, which are due in July, our fraction will break away from the party that seems set on retaining many anti-communists in its ranks, to form the Italian Communist Party, whose first act will be to affiliate to the Communist International.

*Revolutionary greetings.*

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Amadeo Bordiga January/February 1920

# Towards the Establishment of Workers' Councils in Italy

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## I

We have now collected quite a lot of material concerned with proposals and initiatives for establishing Soviets in Italy, and we reserve to ourselves the right to expound the elements of the argument step by step. At this stage we wish to make a few preliminary observations of a general nature, to which we have already referred in our most recent issues.

The system of proletarian representation that has been introduced for the first time ever in Russia has a twofold character: political and economic. Its political role is to struggle against the bourgeoisie until the latter has been totally eradicated. Its economic role is to create the whole novel mechanism of communist production. As the revolution unfolds and the parasitic classes are gradually eliminated, the political functions become less and less important in comparison with their economic counterparts: but in the first instance, *and above all when it is a question of struggling against bourgeois power*, political activity must come first.

The authentic instrument of the proletariat's struggle for liberation, and above all of its conquest of political power, is the *communist class party*. Under the bourgeois regime, the communist party, the engine of the revolution, needs organs in which it can operate; these organs are the workers' councils. To declare that they are the proletariat's organs of liberation, without mentioning the role of the party, after the fashion of the programme adopted at the Congress of Bologna, seems mistaken in our view. To maintain, after the fashion of the Turin *L'Ordine Nuovo* comrades, that even before the collapse of the bourgeoisie the workers' councils are organs, not only of political struggle, but of technico-economic training in the communist system, can only be seen as a return to socialist gradualism. This latter, whether it is called reformism or syndicalism, is defined by the mistaken belief that the proletariat can

achieve emancipation by making advances in economic relations while capitalism still holds political power through the State.

We shall now expand on the criticism of the two concepts we have mentioned.

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The system of proletarian representation must be rooted in the whole of the technical process of production. This is a perfectly valid principle, but it corresponds to the stage when the proletariat is organizing the new economy after its seizure of power. Apply it without modification to the bourgeois regime, and you accomplish nothing in revolutionary terms. Even at the stage which Russia has reached, Soviet-type political representation — i.e. the ladder that culminates in the government of the people's commissars — does not start with work-crews or factory shops, but from the local administrative Soviet, elected directly by the workers (grouped if possible in their respective workplaces). To be specific, the Moscow Soviet is elected by the Moscow proletariat in the ratio of one delegate to every 1,000 workers. Between the delegates and the electors there is no intermediary organ. This first level then leads to higher levels, to the Congress of Soviets, the executive committee, and finally the government of commissars.

The factory *council* plays its part in quite a different network, that of workers' *control* over production. Consequently the factory council, made up of one representative for every workshop, does not nominate the factory's representative in the local political-administrative Soviet: this representative is elected directly and independently. In Russia, the factory councils are the basic unit of another system of representation (itself subordinate of course to the political network of Soviets): the system of workers' control and the people's economy. Control *within the factory* has a revolutionary and expropriative significance only after central power has passed into the hands of the proletariat. While the factory is still protected by the bourgeois State, the factory council controls nothing. The few functions it fulfils are the result of the traditional practice of: 1. parliamentary reformism; 2. trade-union resistance, which does not cease to be a reformist way of advancing.

To conclude: we do not oppose the setting up of internal factory councils if the workers themselves or their organizations demand them. But we insist that the communist party's activity must be based on another terrain, namely the struggle for the conquest of political power. This struggle may well be advanced fruitfully by the setting up of workers' representative bodies — but these must be urban or rural workers' councils elected directly by the 'names, waiting to take the place of municipal councils and local organs of State power at the moment the bourgeois forces collapse. Having thus advanced our thesis, we promise to give it ample documentation and factual support, and to present our work in a report to the next meeting of the communist fraction.



## II

Prior to getting down to discussing the practical problems of setting up workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils in Italy, and bearing in mind the general considerations contained in the article we published in our last issue, we wish to examine the programmatic guidelines or the Soviet system as they are developed in the documents of the Russian revolution and in the declarations of principle issued by some of the Italian maximalist currents, such as the programme adopted by the Bologna Congress, the motion proposed by Leone and other comrades to the same congress; and the writings of *L'Ordine Nuovo* on the Turin factory council movement.

### *The Councils and the Bolshevik Programme*

In the documents of the IIIrd International and the Russian Communist Party, in the masterly reports of those formidable exponents of doctrine, the leaders of the Russian revolutionary movement — Lenin, Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin — there recurs at frequent intervals the idea that the Russian revolution did not *invent* new and unforeseen structures, but merely confirmed the predictions of Marxist theory concerning the revolutionary process.

The core of the imposing phenomenon of the Russian revolution is the conquest of political power on the part of the working masses, and the establishment of their dictatorship, as the result of an authentic class war.

The Soviets — and it is well to recall that the word *soviet* simply means *council*, and can be employed to describe any sort of representative body — the Soviets, as far as history is concerned, are the system of representation employed by the proletarian class once it has taken power. The Soviets are the organs that take the place of parliament and the bourgeois administrative assemblies and gradually replace all the other ramifications of the State. To put it in the words of the most recent congress of the Russian communists, as quoted by Comrade Zinoviev, "the Soviets are the State organizations of the workers and poor peasants; they exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat during the stage when all previous forms of the State are being extinguished.

In the final analysis, this system of State organizations gives representation to all producers in their capacity as members of the working class, and not as members of a particular trade or industrial sector. According to the latest manifesto of the Third International, the Soviets represent "a new type of mass organization, one which embraces the working class in its

entirety, irrespective of individual trades or levels of political maturity". The basic units of the Soviet administrative network are the urban and rural councils; the network culminates in the government of commissars.

And yet it is true that during the phase of economic transformation, other organs are emerging parallel to this system, such as the system of workers' control and the people's economy. It is also true, as we have stressed many times, that this economic system will gradually absorb the political system, once the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is completed and there is no further need for a central authority. But the essential problem during the revolutionary period, as emerges clearly from all the Russian documents, is that of keeping the various local and sectional demands and interests subordinate to the general interest (in space and time) of the revolutionary movement.

Not until the two sets of organs are merged will the network of production be thoroughly communist, and only then will that principle (which in our view is being given exaggerated importance) of a perfect match between the system of representation and the mechanisms of the productive system be successfully realized. Prior to that stage, while the bourgeoisie is still resisting and above all while it still holds power, the problem is to achieve a representative system in which the general interest prevails. Today, while the economy is still based on individualism and competition, the only form in which this higher collective interest can be manifested is a system of *political* representation in which the communist political party is active.

We shall come back to this question, and demonstrate how the desire to over-concretize and technically determine the Soviet system, especially when the bourgeoisie is still in power, puts the cart before the horse and lapses into the old errors of syndicalism and reformism. For the moment we quote these non-ambiguous words of Zinoviev: "The communist party unifies that vanguard of the proletariat which is struggling, in conscious fashion, to put the communist programme into effect. [In particular it is striving to introduce its programme into the State organizations, the Soviets, and to achieve complete dominance within them.

To conclude, the Russian Soviet Republic is led by the Soviets, which represent ten million workers out of a total population of about eighty million. But essentially, appointments to the executive committees of the local and central Soviets are settled in the sections and congresses of the great Communist Party which has mastery over the Soviets. This corresponds to the stirring defence by Radek of the revolutionary role of minorities. It would be as well not to create a majoritarian-workerist fetishism which could only be to the advantage of reformism and the bourgeoisie. The party is in the front line of the revolution in so far as it is potentially composed of men who think and act like members of the future working humanity in which all will be producers harmoniously inserted into a marvellous mechanism of functions and representation.

## *The Bologna Programme and the Councils*

It is to be deplored that in the Party's current programme there is no trace of the Marxist proposition that the class party is the instrument of proletarian emancipation; there is just the anodyne codicil: "decides (Who decides? Even grammar was sacrificed in the haste to decide — in favour of elections.) to base the organization of the Italian Socialist Party on the above-mentioned principles".

As regards the paragraph which denies the transformation of any State organ into an organ of struggle for the liberation of the proletariat, there are certain points to be made — but it will have to be done on another occasion, after an indispensable previous clarification of terms. But we dissent still more strongly from the programme where it states that the new proletarian organs will function initially, under the bourgeois regime, as instruments of the violent struggle for liberation, and will subsequently become organs of social and economic transformation; for among the organs mentioned are not only workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils, but also *councils of the public economy*, which are inconceivable under a bourgeois regime. Even the workers' political councils should be seen primarily as vehicles for the communists' activity of liberating the proletariat.

Even quite recently Comrade Serrati, in flagrant opposition to Marx and Lenin, has undervalued the role of the class party in the revolution. As Lenin says: "Together with the working masses, the Marxist, centralized political party, the vanguard of the proletariat, will lead the people along the right road, towards the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat, towards proletarian not bourgeois democracy, towards Soviet power and the socialist order." The Party's current programme smacks of libertarian scruples and a lack of theoretical preparation.

## *The Councils and the Leone Motion*

This motion was summarized in four points expounded in the author's evocative style.

The first of these points finds miraculous inspiration in the statement that the class struggle is the real engine of history and that it has smashed social-national unions. But then the motion proceeds to exalt the Soviets as the organs of revolutionary synthesis, which they are supposed to bring about virtually through the very mechanism of their being created; it states that only Soviets, rather than schools, parties or corporations, can bring the great historical initiatives to a triumphant conclusion.

This idea of Leone's, and of the many comrades who signed his motion, is quite different

from our own, which we have deduced from Marxism and from the lessons of the Russian revolution. What they are doing is over-emphasizing a *form* in place of a *force*, just as the syndicalists did in the case of the trade unions, attributing to their minimalist practice the magical virtue of being able to transform itself into the social revolution- Just as syndicalism was demolished in the first place by the criticism of true Marxists, and subsequently by the experience of the syndicalist movements which all over the world have collaborated with the bourgeois regime, providing it with elements for its preservation, so Leone's idea collapses before the experience of the counter-revolutionary, social-democratic workers' councils, which are precisely those which have not been penetrated successfully by the communist political programme.

Only the party can embody the dynamic revolutionary energies of the class. It would be trivial to object that socialist parties too have compromised, since we are not exalting the virtues of the party *form*, but those of the dynamic content which is to be found only in the *communist* party. Every party defines itself on the basis of its own programme, and its functions cannot be compared with those of other parties, whereas of necessity all the trade unions and even, in a technical sense, all the workers' councils have functions in common with one another. The shortcoming of the social-reformist parties was not that they were parties, but that they were not communist and revolutionary parties. These parties led the counter-revolution, whereas the communist parties, in opposition to them, led and nourished revolutionary action. Thus there are no organs which are revolutionary by virtue of their form; there are only social forces that are revolutionary on account of their orientation. These forces transform themselves into a party that goes into battle with a programme.

## *The Councils and the initiative of L'Ordine Nuovo in Turin*

In our view, the comrades around the newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* go even further than this. They are not even happy with the wording of the Party's programme, because they claim that the Soviets, including those of a technical-economic character (the factory councils), not only are already in existence and functioning as organs of the proletarian liberation struggle under the bourgeois regime, but have already become organs for the reconstruction of the communist economy.

In fact they publish in their newspaper the section of the Party's programme that we quoted above, leaving out a few words so as to transform its meaning in accordance with their own point of view:

"They will have to be opposed by new proletarian organs (workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils,

councils of the public economy, etc.) — ... organs of social and economic transformation and for the reconstruction of the new communist order." But this article is already a long one, so we postpone to our next issue the exposition of our profound dissension from this principle; in our view, it runs the risk of ending up as a purely reformist experiment involving modification of certain functions of the trade unions and perhaps the promulgation of a bourgeois law on workers' councils."

### III

At the end of our second article on the establishment of Soviets in Italy, we referred to the Turin movement to establish factory councils. We do not share the point of view which inspires the efforts of the *L'Ordine Nuovo* comrades, and while appreciating their tenacity in making the fundamentals of communism better known, we believe that they have committed major errors of principle and tactics.

According to them, the essence of the communist revolution lies in the setting up of new organs of proletarian representation, whose fundamental character is their strict alignment with the process of production; eventually these organs are to control production directly. We have already made the point that we see this as over-emphasis on the idea of a formal coincidence between the representative organs of the working class and the various aggregates of the technico-economic system of production. This coincidence will in fact be achieved at a much more advanced stage of the communist revolution, when production is socialized and all its various constituent activities are subordinated in harmonious fashion to the general and collective interests.

Prior to this stage, and during the period of transition from a capitalist to a communist economy, the groupings of producers are in a constant state of flux and their individual interests may at times clash with the general and collective interests of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. This movement will find its real instrument in a working-class representative institution in which each individual participates in his capacity as a member of the working class, and as such interested in a radical change in social relations, rather than as a component of a particular trade, factory or local group.

So long as political power remains in the hands of the capitalist class, a representative organ embodying the general revolutionary interests of the proletariat can only be found in the *political* arena. It can only be a class party that has the personal adherence of the sort of people who, in order to dedicate themselves to the cause of the revolution, have managed to overcome their narrow selfish, sectional and even sometimes class interests (the latter case obtaining when the party admits deserters from the bourgeois class into its ranks, provided they are supporters of the communist programme).

It is a serious error to believe that by importing the formal structures which one expects to be

formed to manage communist production into the present proletarian environment, among the wage-earners of capitalism, one will bring into being forces which are in themselves and through inner necessity revolutionary. This was the error of the syndicalists, and this too is the error of the over-zealous supporters of the factory councils.

The article published by comrade C. Niccolini in *Comunismo* comes at an opportune moment. He notes that in Russia, even after the proletarian seizure of power, the factory councils frequently placed obstacles in the path of revolutionary measures; to an even greater extent than the trade unions, they counterposed the pressures of narrow interests to the unfolding of the revolutionary process. Even within the network of the communist economy, the factory councils are not the principal determinants of the production process. In the organs which fulfil this function (Councils of the People's Economy), the factory councils have fewer representatives than the trade unions or the proletarian State authorities; it is this centralized political network that is the instrument and the dominant factor in the revolution — understood not only as a struggle against the political resistance of the bourgeois class, but also as a process of socializing wealth.

At the juncture we have reached in Italy, viz. the juncture where the proletarian State is still a programmatic aspiration, the fundamental problem is the conquest of power on the part of the proletariat, or better the communist proletariat — i.e. the workers who are organized into a class-based political party, who are determined to make the historical form of revolutionary power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, into a concrete reality.

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Comrade A. Tasca himself, in *L'Ordine Nuovo* No.22, clearly expounds his disagreement with the programme of the maximalist majority adopted at the Bologna Congress, and his even greater disagreement with us abstentionists, in the following passage that deserves to be reproduced.

"Another point in the Party's new programme deserves to be considered: the new proletarian organs (workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils, councils of the public economy, etc.) functioning *Initially* (under the bourgeois regime) as instruments of the violent struggle for liberation, are *subsequently* transformed into organs of social and economic transformation, for reconstruction of the new communist order. At an earlier session of the Commission, we had stressed the shortcomings of such a formulation, which entrusted different functions to the new organs *initially* and *subsequently*, separated by the seizure of power on the part of the proletariat. Gennari had promised to make an alteration, along the lines of '... initially *predominantly* as instruments...', but it is evident that he eventually abandoned this idea, and as I was unable to attend the last session of the Commission, I could not make him adopt it again. There is in this formulation, however, a veritable point of disagreement which, while bringing Gennari, Bombacci and others closer to the abstentionists, puts a greater distance between them and those who believe that the new workers' organs cannot function as 'instruments of the violent struggle for liberation' except and to the degree that they

become 'organs of social and economic transformation' *at once* (rather than subsequently). The proletariat's liberation is achieved through the manifestation of its ability to control in an autonomous and original fashion the social processes it created by and for itself: liberation consists in the creation of the sort of organs which, if they are active and alert, by virtue of this fact alone provoke the social and economic transformation which is their goal. This is not a question of form, but of substance. In the present formulation, we repeat, the compilers of the programme have ended up adhering to Bordiga's conception, which attaches more importance to the conquest of power than to the formation of Soviets; for the present period, Bordiga sees the Soviets as having more of a 'political' function, in the strict sense of the word, than an organic role of 'economic and social transformation'. Just as Bordiga maintains that the complete Soviet will come into being only during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, so Gennari, Bombacci, etc., argue that only the conquest of power (which thereby acquires a political character, and so brings us back full circle to the 'public powers' that had already been superseded) can provide the Soviets with their true, full functions. It is this which is in our opinion the nub of the argument, and it must lead us' sooner or later, to a further revision of the newly adopted programme."

According to Tasca, then, the working class can project the stages of its liberation, even before it has wrested power from the bourgeoisie. Moreover Tasca lets it be understood that this conquest could occur even without violence, once the proletariat had completed its work of technical preparation and social education: here we have the concrete revolutionary method of the *L'Ordine Nuovo* comrades. We will not proceed at length to demonstrate how this idea eventually coincides with that of reformism and becomes foreign to the fundamentals of revolutionary Marxism; according to Marxist doctrine, the revolution does not occur as a result of the education, culture or technical capacity of the proletariat, but as a result of the inner crises of the system of capitalist production.

Like Enrico Leone, Tasca and his friends attach too much importance to the appearance in the Russian revolution of a new social representative organ, the *Soviet*, and endow it with an inner force such that its mere establishment constitutes a wholly novel historical solution to the proletariat's struggle against capitalism. But the Soviets — most successfully defined by comrade Zinoviev as the State organizations of the working class — are nothing other than organs of proletarian power, exercising the revolutionary dictatorship of the working class; it is this latter which is the lynchpin of the Marxist system, and whose first positive experiment was the Paris Commune of 1871. The Soviets are the form, not the cause, of the revolution.

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In addition to this disagreement, there is another point which separates us from the Turin comrades. The Soviets, State organizations of the victorious proletariat, are not at all the same as the factory councils, nor do these latter constitute the first step or rung of the Soviet political system. This confusion is also present in the declaration of principles adopted by the first assembly of workshop delegates from the factories of Turin, which begins as follows:

"The factory delegates are the sole and authentic social (economic and political) representatives of

the proletarian class, by virtue of their being elected by all workers at their work-place on the basis of universal suffrage. At the various levels of their constitution, the delegates embody the union of all workers as realized in organs of production (work-crew, workshop, factory, union of the factories in a given industry, union of the productive enterprises in a city, union of the organs of production in the mechanical and agricultural industry of a district, a province, a region, the nation, the world) whose authority and social leadership are invested in the councils and council system."

This declaration is unacceptable, since proletarian power is formed directly within the municipal Soviets of town and country, without passing via factory councils and committees, as we have repeated many times; this fact also emerges from the lucid expositions of the Russian Soviet system published by *L'Ordine Nuovo* itself. The factory councils are organs whose task will be to represent the interests of groups of workers during the period of revolutionary transformation of production. They represent not only a particular group's determination to achieve liberation through socialization of the private capitalist's firm, but also the group's concern for the manner in which its interests will be taken into account during the process of socialization itself, a process disciplined by the organized will of the whole of the working collectivity.

The workers' interests have until now been represented by the trade unions, throughout the period when the capitalist system appeared stable and there was scope only for putting upward pressure on wages. The unions will continue to exist during the revolutionary period, and naturally enough there will be a demarcation dispute with the factory councils, which only emerge when the abolition of private capitalism is seen to be imminent, as has happened in Turin. However, it is not a matter of great revolutionary moment to decide whether non-union members should participate or no in the elections for delegates. If it is logical that they should in fact participate, given the very nature of the factory council, it certainly does not appear logical to us that there should be a mingling of organs and functions between councils and unions, along the lines of the Turin proposals — compelling, for example, the Turin section of the Metalworkers' Federation to elect its own executive council from the workshop delegates' assembly.

At any rate, the relations between councils and unions as representatives of the special interests of particular groups of workers will continue to be very complex; they will be settled and harmonized only in a very advanced stage of the communist economy, when the possibility of the interests of a group of producers being at variance with the general interest in the progress of production will be reduced to a minimum.

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What is important to establish is that the communist revolution will be led and conducted by an organ representing the working class *politically*; prior to the smashing of bourgeois power, this is a political party. Subsequently, it is the system of political Soviets elected directly by the



masses, with the aim of choosing representatives who have a general political programme and are not merely the exponents of the narrow interests of a trade or firm.

The Russian system is so contrived that a town's municipal Soviet is composed of one delegate for every group of proletarians, who vote for a single name only. The delegates, however, are proposed to the electors by the political party; the same process is repeated for the second and third degrees of delegation, to the higher organs of the State system. Thus it is always a single political party — the Communist Party — which seeks and obtains from the electors a mandate to administer power. We are certainly not saying that the Russian system should be adopted in an uncritical fashion elsewhere, but we do feel that the principle underlying the revolutionary system of representation — viz. the subjection of selfish and sectional interests to the collective interest — should be adhered to even more closely than in Russia.

Would it usefully serve the communists' revolutionary struggle if the network of a political system of representation of the working class were instituted now? This is the problem we shall examine in the next article, when we discuss the relevant proposals elaborated by the Party leadership. We shall remain unshaken in our conviction that such a representative system would be quite different from the system of factory councils and committees that has begun to form in Turin (and indeed this is partially recognized in the Party's proposals).

## IV

We believe we have already said enough concerning the difference between factory councils and politico-administrative councils of workers and peasants. The factory council represents workers' interests which extend no farther than the narrow circle of an industrial firm. Under a communist regime, it is the basic unit of the system of "workers' control" which has a certain part to play in the system of "Councils of the Economy", a system which will eventually take over the technical and economic management of production. But the factory council has nothing to do with the system of political Soviets, the depositories of proletarian power.

Under the bourgeois regime, therefore, the factory council, or for that matter the trade union, cannot be viewed as an organ for the conquest of political power. If, on the other hand, one were to view them as organs for the emancipation of the proletariat via a route that does not involve the revolutionary conquest of power, one would be lapsing into the syndicalist error: the comrades around *L'Ordine Nuovo* are hardly correct when they maintain, as they have done in polemic with *Guerra di Classe*, that the factory council movement, as they theorize it, is not in some sense a syndicalist movement.

Marxism is characterized by its prediction that the proletariat's Struggle for emancipation will

be divided into a number of great historical phases, in which political activity and economic activity vary enormously in importance: the struggle for power; the exercise of power (dictatorship of the proletariat) in the transformation of the economy; the society without classes and without a political State. To identify, in the role of the liberation organs of the proletariat, the stages of the political process with their economic counterparts is to lapse into the petty-bourgeois caricature of Marxism called economism (which in turn can be classified into reformism and syndicalism). Over-emphasis on the factory council is just a resurrection of this hoary old error, which unites the petty-bourgeois Proudhon with all those revisionists who believe they have transcended Marx.

Under a bourgeois regime, then, the factory council represents the interests of the workers in a particular enterprise, just as it will do under a communist regime. It arises when circumstances demand it, through changes in the methods of proletarian economic organization. But perhaps to an even greater extent than the trade union, the council opens its flank to the deviations of reformism.

The old minimalist tendency that argues in favour of compulsory arbitration and profit-sharing by workers (i.e. their participation in the management and administration of the factory) could well find in the factory council the basis for the drafting of an anti-revolutionary piece of social legislation. This is happening in Germany at the moment, where the Independents are opposing not the principle, but the manner of the draft legislation, in stark contrast to the Communists who maintain that the democratic regime cannot grant the proletariat any form of control whatsoever over capitalist functions. It should thus be clear that it makes no sense to speak of workers' *control* until political power rests in the hands of the proletarian State. Such control can only be exercised, as a prelude to the socialization of firms and their administration by appropriate organs of the collectivity, in the name of the proletarian State and on the basis of its power.

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Councils of workers — industrial workers, peasants and, on occasion, soldiers — are, as is clear, the political organs of the proletariat, the foundations of the proletarian State. The urban and rural local councils take the place of the municipal councils under the bourgeois regime. The provincial and regional Soviets take the place of the present provincial councils, with this difference, that the provincial Soviets are not elected directly, but indirectly from the local Soviets. The State Congress of Soviets, together with the Central Executive Committee, take the place of the bourgeois parliament, with the difference again that they are not elected directly, but by third or even fourth degree suffrage.

There is no need here to emphasize the other differences, of which the most important is the electors' right of recall of any delegate at any time. If the mechanism to cope with these recalls

is to be flexible, then the elections in the first place should not be based on lists of candidates, but should involve giving a single delegate to a grouping of electors who, if possible, should live and work together. But the fundamental characteristic of this whole system does not reside in these technicalities, which have nothing magical about them, but rather in the principle which lays down that the right to vote, both actively and passively, is reserved to the workers alone and denied to the bourgeois.

As far as the formation of municipal Soviets is concerned, two errors are commonly encountered. One is the idea that delegates to the Soviets are elected by factory councils and committees (executive commissions of the councils of workshop delegates), whereas in fact, as we make no apology for repeating, the delegates are elected directly by the mass of electors. This error is reproduced in the Bombacci proposal for establishing Soviets in Italy (Para. 6).

The other error consists in thinking that the Soviet is a body composed of representatives simply nominated by the Socialist Party, the trade unions and the factory councils. Comrade Ambrosini, for example, makes this error in his proposals. Such a system might perhaps be useful in order to form Soviets quickly and on a provisional basis, but it does not correspond to their definitive structure. It is true that in Russia a small percentage of delegates to the Soviet are added to those elected directly by the proletarian electors. But in reality the Communist Party, or any other party, obtains its representation by standing tried and proven members of its organization as candidates, and by campaigning around its programme before the electorate. In our view, a Soviet can only be called revolutionary when a majority of its delegates are members of the Communist Party.

All of this, it should be understood, refers to the period of the proletarian dictatorship. Now we come to the vexed question: what should be the role and characteristics of the workers' councils while the power of the bourgeoisie is still intact?

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In central Europe at the moment, workers' councils co-exist with the bourgeois-democratic State, which is all the more anti-revolutionary in that it is republican and social-democratic. What is the significance of this proletarian representative system, if it is not the depository and foundation of State power? At the very least, does it act as an effective organ of struggle for the realization of the proletarian dictatorship?

These questions are answered by the Austrian comrade Otto Maschl in an article we came across in the Geneva journal, *Nouvelle Internationale*. He states that in Austria the councils have brought about their own paralysis and have handed over their power to the national bourgeois assembly. In Germany on the other hand, according to Maschl, once the Majoritarians and Independents had left the councils, these latter became true foci of the struggle for

proletarian emancipation, and Noske had to smash them in order to allow social-democracy to govern. In Austria, however, Maschl concludes, the existence of councils within the democratic system, or rather the existence of democracy *In spite of the councils*, proves that these workers' councils are far from playing the role of what are called Soviets in Russia. And he expresses the doubt that perhaps at the moment of the revolution, alternative, truly revolutionary Soviets may emerge and become the depositories of proletarian power in place of these domesticated versions.

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The Party programme adopted at Bologna declares that Soviets should be set up in Italy as organs of revolutionary struggle. The object of the Bombacci proposal is to concretize this aim.

Before getting down to details, let us discuss the general ideas which have inspired Comrade Bombacci. First of all, and let no one accuse us of being pedantic, let us request a formal clarification. In the phrase: "only a national institution that is broader than the Soviets can usher the present period towards the final revolutionary struggle against the bourgeois regime and its democratic mask: parliamentarism", does it mean that parliamentarism is the aforementioned *broader institution*, or is it the *democratic mask*? We fear that the first interpretation must be the right one, a feeling which is confirmed by the paragraph on the Soviets' programme of action, which is a strange mixture of the functions of the latter with the Party's parliamentary activity. If the councils to be set up are to carry out their activities on this ambiguous terrain, then it would certainly be better not to set them up at all.

The idea that the Soviets should have the role of working out *proposals for socialist and revolutionary legislation* which socialist deputies will place before the bourgeois State — here we have a proposal that makes a fine pair with the one on communal-electionist Sovietism which was so well demolished by our own D.L. For the moment we shall go no further than remind the comrades who put forward such proposals of one of Lenin's conclusions in the declaration adopted by the Moscow Congress: "Put a distance between yourselves and those who delude the proletariat by proclaiming the possibility of their victories within the bourgeois framework, and propose that the new proletarian organs should combine with or collaborate with the instruments of bourgeois domination." If the former are the social-democrats (who are still members of our Party), should we not recognize the latter in the electionist maximalists, concerned as they are with justifying their parliamentary and communal activity by monstrous pseudo-Soviet projects?

Are the comrades in the faction which was victorious at Bologna blind to the fact that these people are not even in line with that form of communist electionism which may legitimately be opposed — on the basis of the arguments of Lenin and certain German communists — to our own irreducible, principled abstentionism?

## V

With this article we propose to conclude our exposition, though we may resume the discussion in polemic with comrades who have commented on our point of view in other newspapers. The discussion has now been taken up by the whole of the socialist press. The best articles we have come across are those by C. Niccolini in *Avanti!* These articles were written with great clarity and in line with genuine Marxist principles; we fully concur with them.

The Soviets, the councils of workers, peasants (and soldiers), are the form adopted by the representative system of the proletariat, in its exercise of power after the smashing of the capitalist State. Prior to the conquest of power, when the bourgeoisie is still politically dominant, it can happen that special historical conditions, probably corresponding to serious convulsions in the institutional arrangements of the State and society, bring Soviets into existence — and it can be very appropriate for communists to facilitate and stimulate the birth of these new organs of the proletariat. We must, however, be quite clear that their formation in this manner cannot be an artificial procedure, the mere application of a recipe — and that in any case the simple establishment of workers' councils, as *the form* of the proletarian revolution, does not imply that the problem of the revolution is resolved, nor that infallible conditions have been laid for its success. The revolution may not occur even when councils exist (we shall cite examples), if these are not infused with the political and historical consciousness of the proletariat — a consciousness which is condensed, one might almost say, in the communist political party.

The fundamental problem of the revolution thus lies in gauging the proletariat's determination to smash the bourgeois State and take power into its own hands. Such a determination on the part of the broad masses of the working class exists as a direct result of the economic relations of exploitation by capital; it is these which place the proletariat in an intolerable situation and drive it to smash the existing social forms. The task of the communists, then, is to direct this violent reaction on the part of the masses and give it greater efficiency. The communists — as the *Manifesto* said long ago — have a superior knowledge of the conditions of the class struggle and the proletariat's emancipation than the proletariat itself. The critique they make of history and of the constitution of society places them in a position to make fairly accurate predictions concerning the developments of the revolutionary process. It is for this reason that communists form the class's political party, which sets itself the task of unifying the proletarian forces and organizing the proletariat into the dominant class through the revolutionary conquest of power. When the revolution is imminent and its pre-conditions have matured in the real world, a powerful communist party must exist and its consciousness of the events which lie ahead must be particularly acute.

As regards the revolutionary organs which will exercise proletarian power and represent the foundations of the revolutionary State on the morrow of the collapse of the bourgeoisie, their

consciousness of their role will depend on the extent to which they are led by workers who are conscious of the need for a dictatorship of their own class — i.e. communist workers. Wherever this is not the case, these organs will concede the power they have won and the counter-revolution will triumph. Thus if at any given moment these organs are required and communists need to concern themselves with setting them up, it should not therefore be thought that in them we have a means of readily outflanking the bourgeoisie and almost automatically overcoming its resistance to the ceding of power.

Can the Soviets, the State organs of the victorious proletariat, play a role as organs of revolutionary struggle for the proletariat while capitalism still controls the State? The answer is yes — in the sense, however, that at any given stage they may constitute the right terrain for the revolutionary struggle that the Party is waging. And at that particular stage, the Party has to fashion such a terrain, such a grouping of forces, for itself.

Today, in Italy, have we reached this stage of struggle? We feel that we are very close to it, but that there is one more stage to go through. The communist party, which has to work within the Soviets, does not yet exist. We are not saying that the Soviets will wait for it before they emerge. It could happen that events occur differently. But then we will run this grave risk, that the immaturity of the party will allow these organs to fall into the hands of the reformists, the accomplices of the bourgeoisie, the saboteurs and falsifiers of the revolution. And so we feel that the problem of forging a genuine communist party in Italy is much more urgent than the problem of creating Soviets. To study both problems, and establish the optimal conditions in which to tackle both without delay — this too is acceptable, but without setting fixed and schematic dates for an almost official *inauguration* of Soviets in Italy.

To accomplish the formation of the genuine communist party means sorting out the communists from the reformists and social-democrats. Some comrades believe that the very proposal to set up Soviets would also facilitate this sorting out process. We do not agree — for the very reason that the Soviet, in our view, is not in its essence a revolutionary organ. In any case, if the rise of Soviets is to be the source of political clarification, we fail to see how this may be accomplished on the basis of an understanding — as in the Bombacci proposal — between reformists, maximalists, syndicalists and anarchists! On the contrary, the forging of a sound and healthy revolutionary movement in Italy will never be accomplished by advancing new organs modelled on future forms, like factory councils or soviets — just as it was an illusion to believe that the revolutionary spirit could be salvaged from reformism by importing it into the unions, seen as the nucleus of the future society.

We will not effect the sorting-out process through a new recipe, which will frighten no one, but by abandoning once and for all the old "recipes", the pernicious and fatal methods of the past. For well-known reasons, we feel that if a method has to be abandoned, and expelled along with non-communists from our ranks, then it should be the electoral method — and we see no

other route to the setting up of a communist party that is worthy to affiliate to Moscow.

Let us work towards this goal — beginning, as Niccolini puts it so well, with the elaboration of a consciousness, a political culture, in the *leaders*, through a more serious study of the problems of the revolution, with fewer distractions from spurious electoral, parliamentary and minimalist activities.

Let us work towards this goal. let us issue more propaganda concerning the conquest of power, to build awareness of what the revolution will be, what its organs will be, how the Soviets will really function. Then we can say we have done truly valuable work towards establishing the councils of the proletariat and winning within them the revolutionary dictatorship that will open up the radiant road to communism.

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## Appendix

### The Leone statement.

“The Bologna Congress of the Socialist Party proclaims and recognizes that the Russian revolution, which it salutes as the most magnificent event in the history of the world proletariat, has sparked the necessity to facilitate its expansion into all the countries of capitalist civilization; it believes that the methods and forms of this revolutionary expansion, destined to transform the Russian upheaval into a total social revolution, are to be sought in the models of a revolution which, although it is called Russian in reference to geography, is universal in character — a revolution founded on the principle of uniting the proletarians of the world. The lessons we may learn from this revolution of the Soviets, a revolution which has realized in practice all the expectations of the authentic champions of the cause of socialism, may be summarized in the following points.

“1. The class struggle has been revealed as the true engine of the present history of mankind, demonstrating its capacity to smash the social-national union, to which bourgeois governments with their mystifications intended to entrust the task of eliminating or delaying it.

“2. The socialist revolution has manifested a twofold movement in practice: (a) a movement of erosion and emptying of State powers and negation of the fundamental institutions which democratic forms utilize to deflect the historical mission of the proletariat; i.e. constituent assemblies, which place oppressed and oppressors on a sham footing of legal equality, and the parliaments which emerge

from them - complementary organs of State sovereignty and not expressions of the popular will; (b) a movement *of construction*, thanks to a class organ of new creativity — the *Soviet* of workers peasants and soldiers — which, as an organ linking all the oppressed desirous of attaining the giddy heights already reached by the Russian pioneers, should henceforth be established throughout Italy and western Europe, and whose social composition should consist of the masses of workers and peasants and also (without abandoning their individual specificity) the parties which conduct a revolutionary campaign for the abolition of private ownership and the powers of the bourgeois State; the trade unions, which will operate on a more elevated and revolutionary socio-political level within the Soviet than they have hitherto achieved on account of their corporative structure; the members of the co-operative movement, who in the Soviet will be able to struggle against the capitalist regime as allies of the wage-earners, making up for the revolutionary inactivity of their organization; and the working-class Leagues of war veterans.

“3. The political struggle against the State, a military organ of war, in every political form open to it, must as in Russia have passion and rebellious *elan*, because socialism has been transformed from a pure problem in social logic into a furnace of ardour and enthusiasm, by implanting in the civil and military proletariat the confidence that they can effect the transfer of power to the Soviets and subsequently defend them against any revolutionary attack. This and nothing else is the summons to violence that the Russian pioneers challenge us with. It is a debt of honour and a necessity for us to take it up, rather than the conflict and chaos against which socialism in Russia has become the guarantee, as the bearer of a new order.

“4. The Russian Bolshevik Party, and equally the Italian Socialist Party, will not give up its existence until the Soviet experiment has reached full maturity — an experiment which must at once be initiated -though it must subordinate all its activities to the principles suggested by the Russian revolutionary experience, which teaches that only the proletariat grouped in Soviets, which are superior to parties, schools, corporations, may take great historical initiatives and brig them to a triumphant conclusion.”



Amadeo Bordiga May 1920

# Theses of the Abstentionist Communist Faction of the Italian Socialist Party

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**Source:** [web.infinito.it/utenti/c/communism/classici/bordigen.htm](http://web.infinito.it/utenti/c/communism/classici/bordigen.htm);

**Translation:** in *Communist Program*, No.5, June 1979;

**HTML Mark-up:** Andy Blunden 2003.

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## I

1. Communism is the doctrine of the social and historical preconditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.

The elaboration of this doctrine began in the period of the first proletarian movements against the effects of the bourgeois system of production. It took shape in the Marxist critique of the capitalist economy, the method of historical materialism, the theory of class struggle and the conception of the development which will take place in the historical process of the fall of the capitalist regime and the proletarian revolution.

2. It is on the basis of this doctrine - which found its first and fundamental systematic expression in the **Communist Manifesto** of 1848 - that the Communist Party is constituted.

3. In the present historical period, the situation created by bourgeois relations of production, based on the private ownership of the means of production and exchange, on the private appropriation of the products of collective labour and on free competition in private trade of all products, becomes more and more intolerable for the proletariat.

4. To these economic relations correspond the political institutions characteristic of capitalism: the state based on democratic and parliamentary representation. In a society divided into classes, the state is the organisation of the power of the class which is economically privileged. Although the bourgeoisie represents a minority within society, the democratic state represents the system of armed force organised for the purpose of preserving the capitalist relations of production.

5. The struggle of the proletariat against capitalist exploitation assumes a succession of forms going from the violent destruction of machines to the organisation on a craft basis to improve working conditions, to the creation of factory councils, and to attempts to take possession of enterprises.

In all these individual actions, the proletariat moves in the direction of the decisive revolutionary struggle against the power of the bourgeois state, which prevents the present relations of production from being broken.

6. This revolutionary struggle is the conflict between the whole proletarian class and the whole bourgeois class. Its instrument is the political class party, the communist party, which achieves the conscious organisation of the proletarian vanguard aware of the necessity of unifying its action, **in space** - by transcending the interests of particular groups, trades or nationalities - and **in time** - by subordinating to the final outcome of the struggle the partial gains and conquests which do not modify the essence of the bourgeois structure.

Consequently it is only by organising itself into a political party that the proletariat constitutes itself into a class struggling for its emancipation.

7. The objective of the action of the Communist Party is the violent overthrow of bourgeois rule, the conquest of political power by the proletariat, and the organisation of the latter into a ruling class.

8. Parliamentary democracy in which citizens of every class are represented is the form assumed by the organisation of the bourgeoisie into a ruling class. The organisation of the proletariat into a ruling class will instead be achieved through the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, through a type of state in which representation (the system of workers' councils) will be decided only by members of the working class (the industrial proletariat and the poor peasants), with the bourgeois being denied the right to vote.

9. After the old bureaucratic, police and military machine has been destroyed, the proletarian state will unify the armed forces of the labouring class into an organisation which will have as its task the repression of all counter-revolutionary attempts by the dispossessed class and the execution of measures of intervention into bourgeois relations of production and property.

10. The process of transition from the capitalist economy to a communist one will be extremely complex and its phases will differ according to differing degrees of economic development. The endpoint of this process will be the total achievement of the ownership and management of the means of production by the whole unified collectivity, together with the central and rational distribution of productive forces among the different branches of production, and finally the central administration of the allocation of products by the collectivity.

11. When capitalist economic relationships have been entirely eliminated, the abolition of classes will be an accomplished fact and the state, as a political apparatus of power, will be

progressively replaced by the rational, collective administration of economic and social activity.

12. The process of transforming the relations of production will be accompanied by a wide range of social measures stemming from the principle that the collectivity takes charge of the physical and intellectual existence of all its members. In this way, all the birth marks which the proletariat has inherited from the capitalist world will be progressively eliminated and, in the words of the **Manifesto**, in place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

13. The pre-conditions for the victory of proletarian power in the struggle for the realization of communism are to be found not so much in the rational use of skills in technical tasks, as in the fact that political responsibilities and the control of the state apparatus are confided to those people who will put the general interest and the final triumph of communism before the particular and limited interests of groups.

Precisely because the Communist Party is the organisation of proletarians who have achieved this class consciousness, the aim of the party will be, by its propaganda, to win elective posts for its members within the social organisation. The dictatorship of the proletariat will therefore be the dictatorship of the Communist Party and the latter will be a party of government in a sense totally opposed to that of the old oligarchies, for communists will assume responsibilities which will demand the maximum of sacrifice and renunciation and they will take upon their shoulders the heaviest burden of the revolutionary task which falls on the proletariat in the difficult labour through which a new world will come to birth.

## II

1. The critique which communists continuously make on the basis of the fundamental methods of Marxism, and the propagation of the conclusions to which it leads, have as their objective the extirpation of those influences which the ideological systems of other classes and other parties have over the proletariat.

2. First of all, communism sweeps away idealist conceptions which consider the material of the world of thought as the base, and not the result, of the real relations of human life and of their development. All religious and philosophical formulations of this type must be considered as the ideological baggage of classes whose supremacy - which preceded the bourgeois epoch - rested on an ecclesiastical, aristocratic or dynastic organisation receiving its authority only from a pretended super-human investiture.

One symptom of the decadence of the modern bourgeoisie is the fact that those old ideologies which it had itself destroyed reappear in its midst under new forms.

A communism founded on idealist bases would be an unacceptable absurdity.

3. In still more characteristic fashion, communism is the demolition of the conceptions of liberalism and bourgeois democracy by the Marxist critique. The juridical assertion of freedom of thought and political equality of citizens, and the idea that institutions founded on the rights of the majority and on the mechanism of universal electoral representation are a sufficient base for a gradual and indefinite progress of human society, are ideologies which correspond to the regime of private economy and free competition, and to the interests of the capitalist class.

4. One of the illusions of bourgeois democracy is the belief that the living conditions of the masses can be improved through increasing the education and training provided by the ruling classes and their institutions. In fact it is the opposite: raising the intellectual level of the great masses demands, as a pre-condition, a better standard of material life, something which is incompatible with the bourgeois regime. Moreover through its schools, the bourgeoisie tries to broadcast precisely the ideologies which inhibit the masses from perceiving the present institutions as the very obstacle to their emancipation.

5. Another fundamental tenet of bourgeois democracy lies in the principle of nationality. The formation of states on a national basis corresponds to the class necessities of the bourgeoisie at the moment when it establishes its own power, in that it can thus avail itself of national and patriotic ideologies (which correspond to certain interests common in the initial period of capitalism to people of the same race, language and customs) and use them to delay and mitigate the conflict between the capitalist state and the proletarian masses.

National irredentism's are thus born of essentially bourgeois interests.

The bourgeoisie itself does not hesitate to trample on the principle of nationality as soon as the development of capitalism drives it to the often violent conquest of foreign markets and to the resulting conflict among the great states over the latter. Communism transcends the principle of nationality in that it demonstrates the identical predicament in which the mass of disinherited workers find themselves with respect to employers, whatever may be the nationality of either the former or the latter; it proclaims the international association to be the type of political organisation which the proletariat will create when it, in turn, comes to power.

In the perspective of the communist critique, therefore, the recent world war was brought about by capitalist imperialism. This critique demolishes those various interpretations which take up the viewpoint of one or another bourgeois state and try to present the war as a vindication of the national rights of certain peoples or as a struggle of democratically more advanced states against those organised on pre-bourgeois forms, or finally, as a supposed necessity of self-defence against enemy aggression.

6. Communism is likewise opposed to the conceptions of bourgeois pacifism and to Wilsonian illusions on the possibility of a world association of states, based on disarmament and arbitration and having as its pre-condition the Utopia of a sub-division of state units by nationality. For communists, war will become impossible and national questions will be solved only when the capitalist regime has been replaced by the International Communist Republic.

7. In a third area, communism presents itself as the transcendence of the systems of utopian socialism which seek to eliminate the faults of social organisation by instituting complete plans for a new organisation of society whose possibility of realisation was not put in relationship to the real development of history.

8. The proletariat's elaboration of its own interpretation of society and history to guide its action against the social relations of the capitalist world, continuously gives rise to a multitude of schools or currents, influenced to a greater or lesser degree by the very immaturity of the conditions of struggle and by all the various bourgeois prejudices. From all this arise the errors and setbacks in proletarian action. But it is due to this material of experience that the communist movement succeeds in defining with ever greater clarity the central features of its doctrine and its tactics, differentiating itself clearly from all the other currents active within the proletariat itself and openly combating them.

9. The formation of producers' co-operatives, in which the capital belongs to the workers who work in them, cannot be a path towards the suppression of the capitalist system. This is because the acquisition of raw materials and the distribution of products are effected according to the laws of private economy and consequently, credit, and therefore private capital ultimately exercises control over the collective capital of the co-operative itself.

10. Communists cannot consider economic trade or craft organisations to be sufficient for the struggle for the proletarian revolution or as the basic organs of the communist economy.

The organisation of the class through trade unions serves to neutralise competition between workers of the same trade and prevents wages falling to the lowest level. However it cannot lead to the elimination of capitalist profit, still less to the unification of the workers of all trades against the privilege of bourgeois power. Further, the simple transfer of the ownership of the enterprises from the private employer to the workers' union could not achieve the basic economic features of communism, for the latter necessitates the transfer of ownership to the whole proletarian collectively since this is the only way to eliminate the characteristics of the private economy in the appropriation and distribution of products.

Communists consider the union as the site of an initial proletarian experience which permits the workers to go further towards the concept and the practice of political struggle, which has as its organ the class party.

11. In general, it is an error to believe that the revolution is a question of forms of organisations which proletarians group into according to their position and interests within the framework of the capitalist system of production.

It is not a modification of the structure of economic organisations, then, which can provide the proletariat with an effective instrument for its emancipation.

Factory unions and factory councils emerge as organs for the defence of the interests of the proletarians of different enterprises at the point when it begins to appear possible that capitalist

despotism in the management of the enterprises could be limited. But obtaining the right of these organisations to supervise (to monitor) production to a more or less large degree is not incompatible with the capitalist system and could even be used by it as a means to preserve its domination.

Even the transfer of factory management to factory councils would not mean (any more than in the case of the unions) the advent of the communist system. According to the true communist conception, workers' supervision of production will not be achieved until after the overthrow of bourgeois power, and it will be a supervision over the running of every enterprise exercised by the whole proletariat unified in the state of workers' councils. Communist management of production will be the direction of every branch and every productive unit by rational collective organs which will represent the interests of all workers united in the work of building communism.

12. Capitalist relations of production cannot be modified by the intervention of the organs of bourgeois power.

This is why the transfer of private enterprises to the state or to the local government does not correspond in the slightest to the communist conception. Such a transfer is invariably accompanied by the payment of the capital value of the enterprise to the former owners who thus fully retain their right to exploit. The enterprises themselves continue to function as private enterprises within the framework of the capitalist economy, and they often become convenient instruments in the work of class preservation and defence undertaken by the bourgeois state.

13. The idea that capitalist exploitation of the proletariat can be gradually diminished and then eliminated by the legislative and reformist action of present political institutions, be it elicited by representatives of the proletarian party inside those institutions or even by mass agitation, leads only to complicity in the defence of the privileges of the bourgeoisie. The latter will on occasion pretend to give up a minimum of its privileges in order to try to appease the anger of the masses and to divert their revolutionary attempts against the bases of the capitalist regime.

14. The conquest of political power by the proletariat, even if such an objective is considered as the final, total aim of its action, cannot be achieved by winning a majority within bourgeois elective organs.

Thanks to the executive organs of the state, which are the direct agents of the bourgeoisie, the latter very easily ensures a majority within the elective organs for its delegates or for those elements which fall under its influence or into its game because they want to individually or collectively win elective posts. Moreover, participation in such institutions requires the agreement to respect the juridical and political bases of the bourgeois constitution. This agreement is merely formal but nevertheless it is sufficient to free the bourgeoisie from even the slightest embarrassment of an accusation of formal illegality at the point when it will logically resort to its real means of armed defence rather than abandon power and permit the proletariat to smash its bureaucratic and military machine of domination.

15. To recognise the necessity of insurrectionary struggle for the seizure of power, while at the same time proposing that the proletariat exercise its power by conceding representation to the bourgeoisie in new political organisations (constituent assemblies or combinations of these with the system of workers' councils) is an unacceptable program and is opposed to the central communist demand, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The process of expropriating the bourgeoisie would be immediately compromised if this class retained a means to influence somehow the formation of the representative organs of the expropriating proletarian state. This would permit the bourgeoisie to use the influence which it will inevitably retain because of its experience and its intellectual and technical training, in order to deploy its political activity towards the reestablishment of its power in a counter-revolution. The same consequences would result if the slightest democratic prejudice was allowed to survive in regard to an equality of treatment which is supposedly to be granted to the bourgeois by the proletarian power in such matters as freedom of association, propaganda and the press.

16. The program which proposes an organ of political representation based on delegates from the various trades and professions of all the social classes is not even in form a road leading to the system of workers' councils, since the latter is characterised by the exclusion of the bourgeois from electoral rights and its central organisation is not chosen on the basis of trade but by territorial constituency. The form of representation in question is rather an inferior stage even in comparison with present parliamentary democracy.

17. Anarchism is profoundly opposed to the ideas of communism. It aims at the immediate installation of a society without a state and political system and advocates, for the economy of the future, the autonomous functioning of units of production, rejecting any concept of a central organisation and regulation of human activities in production and distribution. Such a conception is close to that of the bourgeois private economy and remains alien to the fundamental essence of communism. Moreover the immediate elimination of the state as a machinery of political power would be equivalent to a failure to offer resistance to the counter-revolution, unless one presupposes that classes have been immediately abolished, that is to say that there has been the so-called revolutionary expropriation simultaneous with the insurrection against bourgeois power.

Not the slightest possibility of this exists, given the complexity of the proletarian tasks in the substitution of the communist economy for the present one, and given the necessity that such a process be directed by a central. organisation representing the general interest of the proletariat and subordinating to this interest all the local and particular interests which act as the principal conservative force within capitalism.

### III

1. The communist doctrine and economic determinism do not see communists as passive spectators of historical destiny but on the contrary as indefatigable fighters. Struggle and action, however, would be ineffective if divorced from the lessons of doctrine and of experience seen in the light of the communist critique.
2. The revolutionary work of communists is based on the organisation into a party of those proletarians who unite a consciousness of communist principles with the decision to devote all their energy to the cause of the revolution. The party, organised internationally, functions on the basis of discipline towards the decisions of the majority and towards the decisions of the central organs chosen by that majority to lead the movement.
3. Propaganda and proselytism - in which the party accepts new members only on the basis of the most sure guarantees - are fundamental activities of the party. Although it bases the success of its action on the propagation of its principles and final objectives and although it struggles in the interest of the immense majority of society, the communist movement does not make the approval of the majority a pre-condition for its action. The criterion which determines the occasion to launch a revolutionary action is the objective evaluation of our own forces and those of our enemies, taking into consideration all the complex factors of which the numerical element is not the sole or even the most important determinant.
4. The communist party, internally, develops an intense work of study and political critique intimately linked to the exigencies of action and to historical experience, and it strives to organise this work on an international basis. Externally, in all circumstances and with the means at its disposal, it works to diffuse the lessons of its own critical experience and to refute enemy schools and parties. Above all, the party conducts its activity and propaganda among the proletarian masses and works to polarise them around it, particularly at those times when they are set in motion in reaction against the conditions capitalism imposes upon them and especially within the organisations formed by proletarians to defend their immediate interests.
5. Communists therefore penetrate proletarian co-operatives, unions, factory councils, and form groups of communist workers within them. They strive to win a majority and posts of leadership so that the mass of proletarians mobilised by these associations subordinate their action to the highest political and revolutionary ends of the struggle for communism.
6. The communist party, on the other hand, remains outside all institutions and associations in which bourgeois and workers participate in common, or worse still, which are led and sponsored by members of the bourgeoisie (societies of mutual assistance, charities, cultural schools, popular universities, Freemasons' Lodges, etc.). It combats the action and influence of these institutions and associations and tries to divert proletarians from them.
7. Participation in elections to the representative organs of bourgeois democracy and participation in parliamentary activity, while always presenting a continuous danger of



deviation, may be utilised for propaganda and for schooling the movement during the period in which there does not yet exist the possibility of overthrowing bourgeois rule and in which, as a consequence, the party's task is restricted to criticism and opposition. In the present period, which began with the end of the world war, with the first communist revolutions and the creation of the Third International, communists pose, as the direct objective of the political action of the proletariat in every country, the revolutionary conquest of power, to which end all the energy and all the preparatory work of the party must be devoted.

In this period, it is inadmissible to participate in these organs which function as a powerful defensive instrument of the bourgeoisie and which are designed to operate even within the ranks of the proletariat. It is precisely in opposition to these organs, to their structure as to their function, that communists call for the system of workers' councils and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Because of the great importance which electoral activity assumes in practice, it is not possible to reconcile this activity with the assertion that it is not the means of achieving the principal objective of the party's action, which is the conquest of power. It also is not possible to prevent it from absorbing all the activity of the movement and from diverting it from revolutionary preparation.

8. The electoral conquest of local governmental bodies entails the same inconveniences as parliamentarism but to an even greater degree. It cannot be accepted as a means of action against bourgeois power for two reasons:

- 1) these local bodies have no real power but are subjected to the state machine, and
- 2) although the assertion of the principle of local autonomy can today cause some embarrassment for the ruling bourgeoisie, such a method would have the result of providing it with a base of operations in its struggle against the establishment of proletarian power and is contrary to the communist principle of centralised action.

9. In the revolutionary period, all the efforts of the communists concentrate on enabling the action of the masses to attain a maximum of intensity and efficiency. Communists combine propaganda and revolutionary preparation with the organisation of large and frequent proletarian demonstrations above all in the major centres and strive to use economic movements in order to organise demonstrations of a political character in which the proletariat reaffirms and strengthens its will to overthrow the bourgeois power.

10. The Communist Party carries its propaganda into the ranks of the bourgeois army. Communist anti-militarism is not based on a sterile humanitarianism. Its aim instead is to convince proletarians that the bourgeoisie arms them to defend its own interests and to use their force against the cause of the proletariat.

11. The Communist Party trains itself to act as the general staff of the proletariat in the revolutionary war. For this reason it prepares and organises its own network of intelligence and

communication. Above all, it supports and organises the arming of the proletariat.

12. The Communist Party concludes no agreements or alliances with other political movements which share with it a specific immediate objective, but diverge from it in their program of further action. It must equally refuse the alliance - otherwise known as the united fronts - with all working class tendencies which accept insurrectionary action against the bourgeoisie but diverge from the communist program in the development of subsequent action.

Communists have no reason to consider the growth of forces tending to overthrow bourgeois power as a favourable condition when the forces working for the constitution of proletarian power on communist directives remain insufficient, since only a communist leadership can assure its success.

13. The soviets or councils of workers, peasants and soldiers, constitute the organs of proletarian power and can exercise their true function only after the overthrow of bourgeois rule.

Soviets are not in themselves organs of revolutionary struggle. They become revolutionary when the Communist Party wins a majority within them.

Workers' councils can also arise before the revolution, in a period of acute crisis in which the state power is seriously threatened.

In a revolutionary situation, it may be necessary for the party to take the initiative in forming soviets, but this cannot be a means of precipitating such a situation. If the power of the bourgeoisie is strengthened, the survival of councils can present a serious danger to the revolutionary struggle - the danger of a conciliation and a combination of proletarian organs with the organs of bourgeois democracy.

14. What distinguishes communists is not that, in every situation and in every episode of the class struggle, they call for the immediate mobilisation of all proletarian forces for a general insurrection. What distinguishes them is that they clearly say that the phase of insurrection is an inevitable outcome of the struggle, and that they prepare the proletariat to face it in conditions favourable to the success and the further development of the revolution.

Depending on the situation - which the party can better assess than the rest of the proletariat - the party can therefore find itself confronted with the necessity to act in order to hasten or to delay the moment of the decisive battle. In any event, the specific task of the party is to fight both against those who, desiring to hasten revolutionary action at any price, could drive the proletariat into disaster, and against the opportunists who exploit every occasion in which decisive action is undesirable in order to block the revolutionary movement by diverting the action of the masses towards other objectives. The Communist Party, on the contrary, must lead the action of the masses always further in an effective preparation for the final and inevitable armed struggle against the defensive forces of bourgeois rule.

## **Bordiga Archive**

Amadeo Bordiga. 1920

# Seize Power or Seize the Factory?

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**Source:** *Il Soviet*, 22 February 1920, Vol.III, No.7.

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The working-class disturbances of the past few days in Liguria have seen yet another example of a phenomenon that for some time now has been repeated with some frequency, and that deserves to be examined as a symptom of a new level of consciousness among the working masses.

Instead of abandoning their jobs, the workers have so to speak taken over their plants and sought to operate them for their own benefit, or more precisely without the top managers being present in the plant. Above all, this indicates that the workers are fully aware that the strike is not always the best weapon to use, especially under certain circumstances.

The economic strike, through the immediate harm it inflicts on the worker himself, derives its utility as a defensive weapon for the worker from the harm the work-stoppage inflicts on the industrialist by cutting back the output which belongs to him.

This is the state of affairs under normal conditions in the capitalist economy, when competition and price-cutting force a continual increase in production itself. Today the profiteers of industry, in particular the engineering industry, are emerging from an exceptional period in which they were able to amass enormous profits for a minimum of effort. During the war the State supplied them with raw materials and coal and, at the same time, acted as sole and reliable purchaser. Furthermore, through its militarization of factories, the State itself undertook to impose a rigorous discipline on the working masses. What more favourable conditions could there be for a fat profit? But now these people are no longer disposed to deal with all the difficulties arising from shortages of coal and raw materials, from the instability of the market and the fractiousness of the working masses. In particular, they are not disposed to put up with modest profits which are roughly the same or perhaps a bit below their pre-War level.

This is why they are not worried by strikes. Indeed they positively welcome them, while mouthing a few protests about the absurd claims and insatiability of the workers. The workers have understood this, and through their action of taking over the factory and carrying on working instead of striking, they are making it clear that it is not that they have no wish to work, but that they have no wish to work the way the bosses tell them to. They no longer want to be exploited and work for the benefit of the bosses; they want to work for their own benefit, i.e. in the interests of the work-force alone.

This new consciousness that is emerging more clearly every day should be held in the highest regard; however, we would not want it to be led astray by vain illusions.

It is rumoured that factory councils, where they were in existence, functioned by taking over the management of the workshops and carrying on the work. We would not like the working masses to get hold of the idea that all they need do to take over the factories and get rid of the capitalists is set up councils. This would indeed be a dangerous illusion. The factory will be conquered by the working class – and not only by the workforce employed in it, which would be too weak and non-communist – only after the working class as a whole has seized political power. Unless it has done so, the Royal Guards, military police, etc. – in other words, the mechanism of force and oppression that the bourgeoisie has at its disposal, its political power apparatus – will see to it that all illusions are dispelled.

It would be better if these endless and useless adventures that are daily exhausting the working masses were all channelled, merged and organized into one great, comprehensive upsurge aimed directly at the heart of the enemy bourgeoisie.

Only a communist party should and would be able to carry out such an undertaking. At this time, such a party should and would have no other task than that of directing all its activity towards making the working masses increasingly conscious of the need for this grand political attack – the only more or less direct route to the take-over of the factory, which if any other route is taken may never fall into their hands at all.

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Amadeo Bordiga 1921

# Party and Class

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The Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution approved by the Second Congress of the Communist International are genuinely and deeply rooted in the Marxist doctrine. These theses take the definition of the relations between party and class as a starting point and establish that the class party can include in its ranks only a part of the class itself, never the whole nor even perhaps the majority of it. This obvious truth would have been better emphasised if it had been pointed out that one cannot even speak of a class unless a minority of this class tending to organise itself into a political party has come into existence. What in fact is a social class according to our critical method? Can we possibly recognise it by the means of a purely objective external acknowledgement of the common economic and social conditions of a great number of individuals, and of their analogous positions in relationship to the productive process? That would not be enough. Our method does not amount to a mere description of the social structure as it exists at a given moment, nor does it merely draw an abstract line dividing all the individuals composing society into two groups, as is done in the scholastic classifications of the naturalists. The Marxist critique sees human society in its movement, in its development in time; it utilises a fundamentally historical and dialectical criterion, that is to say, it studies the connection of events in their reciprocal interaction. Instead of taking a snapshot of society at a given moment (like the old metaphysical method) and then studying it in order to distinguish the different categories into which the individuals composing it must be classified, the dialectical method sees history as a film unrolling its successive scenes; the class must be looked for and distinguished in the striking features of this movement. In using the first method we would be the target of a thousand objections from pure statisticians and demographers (short-sighted people if there ever were) who would re-examine our divisions and remark that there are not two classes, nor even three or four, but that there can be ten, a hundred or even a thousand classes separated by successive gradations and indefinable transition zones. With the second method, though, we make use of quite different criteria in order to distinguish that protagonist of historical tragedy, the class, and in order to define its characteristics, its actions and its objectives, which become concretised into obviously uniform features among a multitude of changing facts; meanwhile the poor photographer of statistics only records these as a cold series of lifeless data. Therefore, in order to state that a class exists

and acts at a given moment in history, it will not be enough to know, for instance, how many merchants there were in Paris under Louis XIV, or the number of English landlords in the Eighteenth Century, or the number of workers in the Belgian manufacturing industry at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. Instead, we will have to submit an entire historical period to our logical investigations; we will have to make out a social, and therefore political, movement which searches for its way through the ups and downs, the errors and successes, all the while obviously adhering to the set of interests of a strata of people who have been placed in a particular situation by the mode of production and by its developments. It is this method of analysis that Frederick Engels used in one of his first classical essays, where he drew the explanation of a series of political movements from the history of the English working class, and thus demonstrated the existence of a class struggle. This dialectical concept of the class allows us to overcome the statistician's pale objections. He does not have the right any longer to view the opposed classes as being clearly divided on the scene of history as are the different choral groups on a theatre scene. He cannot refute our conclusions by arguing that in the contact zone there are undefinable strata through which an osmosis of individuals takes place, because this fact does not alter the historical physiognomy of the classes facing one another

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Therefore the concept of class must not suggest to us a static image, but instead a dynamic one. When we detect a social tendency, or a movement oriented towards a given end, then we can recognise the existence of a class in the true sense of the word. But then the class party exists in a material if not yet in a formal way. A party lives when there is the existence of a doctrine and a method of action. A party is a school of political thought and consequently an organisation of struggle. The first characteristic is a fact of consciousness, the second is a fact of will, or more precisely of a striving towards a final end. Without those two characteristics, we do not yet have the definition of a class. As we have already said, he who coldly records facts may find affinities in the living conditions of more or less large strata, but no mark is engraved in history's development. It is only within the class party that we can find these two characteristics condensed and concretised. The class forms itself as certain conditions and relationships brought about by the consolidation of new systems of production are developed – for instance the establishment of big factories hiring and training a large labour force; in the same way, the interests of such a collectivity gradually begin to materialise into a more precise consciousness, which begins to take shape in small groups of this collectivity. When the mass is thrust into action, only these first groups can foresee a final end, and it is they who support and lead the rest. When referring to the modern proletarian class, we must conceive of this process not in relationship to a trade category but to the class as a whole. It can then be realised how a more precise consciousness of the identity of interests gradually makes its appearance; this consciousness, however, results from such a complexity of experiences and ideas, that it can be found only in limited groups composed of elements selected from every category. Indeed only an advanced minority can have the clear vision of a collective action which is directed towards

general ends that concern the whole class and which has at its core the project of changing the whole social regime. Those groups, those minorities, are nothing other than the party. When its formation (which of course never proceeds without arrests, crises and internal conflicts) has reached a certain stage, then we may say that we have a class in action. Although the party includes only a part of the class, only it can give the class its unity of action and movement, for it amalgamates those elements, beyond the limits of categories and localities, which are sensitive to the class and represent it. This casts a light on the meaning of this basic fact: the party is only a part of the class. He who considers a static and abstract image of society, and sees the class as a zone with a small nucleus, the party, within it, might easily be led to the following conclusion: since the whole section of the class remaining outside the party is almost always the majority, it might have a greater weight and a greater right. However if it is only remembered that the individuals in that great remaining mass have neither class consciousness nor class will yet and live for their own selfish ends, or for their trade, their village, their nation, then it will be realised that in order to secure the action of the class as a whole in the historical movement, it is necessary to have an organ which inspires, unites and heads it – in short which officers it; it will then be realised that the party actually is the nucleus without which there would be no reason to consider the whole remaining mass as a mobilisation of forces. The class presupposes the party, because to exist and to act in history it must possess a critical doctrine of history and an aim to attain in it.

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In the only true revolutionary conception, the direction of class action is delegated to the party. Doctrinal analysis, together with a number of historical experiences, allow us to easily reduce to petty bourgeois and anti-revolutionary ideologies, any tendency to deny the necessity and the predominance of the party's function. If this denial is based on a democratic point of view, it must be subjected to the same criticism that Marxism uses to disprove the favourite theorems of bourgeois liberalism. It is sufficient to recall that, if the consciousness of human beings is the result, not the cause of the characteristics of the surroundings in which they are compelled to live and act, then never as a rule will the exploited, the starved and the underfed be able to convince themselves of the necessity of overthrowing the well-fed satiated exploiter laden with every resource and capacity. This can only be the exception. Bourgeois electoral democracy seeks the consultation of the masses, for it knows that the response of the majority will always be favourable to the privileged class and will readily delegate to that class the right to govern and to perpetuate exploitation. It is not the addition or subtraction of the small minority of bourgeois voters that will alter the relationship. The bourgeoisie governs with the majority, not only of all the citizens, but also of the workers taken alone. Therefore if the party called on the whole proletarian mass to judge the actions and initiatives of which the party alone has the responsibility, it would tie itself to a verdict that would almost certainly be favourable to the bourgeoisie. That verdict would always be less enlightened, less advanced, less revolutionary, and above all less dictated by a consciousness of the really collective interest of



the workers and of the final result of the revolutionary struggle, than the advice coming from the ranks of the organised party alone. The concept of the proletariat's right to command its own class action is only on abstraction devoid of any Marxist sense. It conceals a desire to lead the revolutionary party to enlarge itself by including less mature strata, since as this progressively occurs, the resulting decisions get nearer and nearer to the bourgeois and conservative conceptions. If we looked for evidence not only through theoretical enquiry, but also in the experiences history has given us, our harvest would be abundant. Let us remember that it is a typical bourgeois cliché to oppose the good "common sense" of the masses to the "evil" of a "minority of agitators", and to pretend to be most favourably disposed towards the exploited's interests. The right-wing currents of the workers' movement, the social-democratic school, whose reactionary tenets have been clearly shown by history, constantly oppose the masses to the party and pretend to be able to find the will of the class by consulting on a scale wider than the limited bounds of the party. When they cannot extend the party beyond all limits of doctrine and discipline in action, they try to establish that its main organs must not be those appointed by a limited number of militant members, but must be those which have been appointed for parliamentary duties by a larger body – actually, parliamentary groups always belong to the extreme right wing of the parties from which they come. The degeneration of the social-democratic parties of the Second International and the fact that they apparently became less revolutionary than the unorganised masses, are due to the fact that they gradually lost their specific party character precisely through workerist and "labourist" practices. That is, they no longer acted as the vanguard preceding the class but as its mechanical expression in an electoral and corporative system, where equal importance and influence is given to the strata that are the least conscious and the most dependent on egotistical claims of the proletarian class itself. As a reaction to this epidemic, even before the war, there developed a tendency, particularly in Italy, advocating internal party discipline, rejecting new recruits who were not yet welded to our revolutionary doctrine, opposing the autonomy of parliamentary groups and local organs, and recommending that the party should be purged of its false elements. This method has proved to be the real antidote for reformism, and forms the basis of the doctrine and practice of the Third International, which puts primary importance on the role of the party – that is a centralised, disciplined party with a clear orientation on the problems of principles and tactics. The same Third International judged that the "collapse of the socialdemocratic parties of the Second International was by no means the collapse of proletarian parties in general" but, if we may say so, the failure of organisms that had forgotten they were parties because they had stopped being parties.

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There is also a different category of objection to the communist concept of the party's role. These objections are linked to another form of critical and tactical reaction to the reformist degeneracy: they belong to the syndicalist school, which sees the class in the economic trade unions and pretends that these are the organs capable of leading the class in revolution.

Following the classical period of the French, Italian and American syndicalism, these apparently left-wing objections found new formulations in tendencies which are on the margins of the Third International. These too can be easily reduced to semi-bourgeois ideologies by a critique of their principles as well as by acknowledging the historical results they led to. These tendencies would like to recognise the class within an organisation of its own – certainly a characteristic and a most important one – that is, the craft or trade unions which arise before the political party, gather much larger masses and therefore better correspond to the whole of the working class. From an abstract point of view, however, the choice of such a criterion reveals an unconscious respect for that selfsame democratic lie which the bourgeoisie relies on to secure its power by the means of inviting the majority of the people to choose their government. In other theoretical viewpoints, such a method meets with bourgeois conceptions when it entrusts the trade unions with the organisation of the new society and demands the autonomy and decentralisation of the productive functions, just as reactionary economists do. But our present purpose is not to draw out a complete critical analysis of the syndicalist doctrines. It is sufficient to remark, considering the result of historical experience, that the extreme right wing members of the proletarian movement have always advocated the same point of view, that is, the representation of the working class by trade unions; indeed they know that by doing so, they soften and diminish the movement's character, for the simple reasons that we have already mentioned. Today the bourgeoisie itself shows a sympathy and an inclination, which are by no means illogical, towards the unionisation of the working class. Indeed, the more intelligent sections of the bourgeoisie would readily accept a reform of the state and representative apparatus in order to give a larger place to the "apolitical" unions and even to their claims to exercise control over the system of production. The bourgeoisie feels that, as long as the proletariat's action can be limited to the immediate economic demands that are raised trade by trade, it helps to safeguard the status-quo and to avoid the formation of the perilous "political" consciousness – that is, the only consciousness which is revolutionary for it aims at the enemy's vulnerable point, the possession of power. Past and present syndicalists, however, have always been conscious of the fact that most trade unions are controlled by right wing elements and that the dictatorship of the petty bourgeois leaders over the masses is based on the union bureaucracy even more than on the electoral mechanism of the social-democratic pseudo-parties. Therefore the syndicalists, along with very numerous elements who were merely acting in reaction to the reformist practice, devoted themselves to the study of new forms of union organisation and created new unions independent from the traditional ones. Such an expedient was theoretically wrong for it did not go beyond the fundamental criterion of the economic organisation: that is, the automatic admission of all those who are placed in given conditions by the part they play in production, without demanding special political convictions or special pledges of actions which may require even the sacrifice of their lives. Moreover, in looking for the "producer" it could not go beyond the limits of the "trade", whereas the class party, by considering the "proletarian" in the vast range of his conditions and activities, is alone able to awaken the revolutionary spirit of the class. Therefore, that remedy which was wrong theoretically also proved inefficient in

actuality. In spite of everything, such recipes are constantly being sought for even today. A totally wrong interpretation of Marxist determinism and a limited conception of the part played by facts of consciousness and will in the formation, under the original influence of economic factors, of the revolutionary forces, lead a great number of people to look for a “mechanical” system of organisation that would almost automatically organise the masses according to each individual’s part in production. According to these illusions, such a device by itself would be enough to make the mass ready to move towards revolution with the maximum revolutionary efficiency. Thus the illusory solution reappears, which consists of thinking that the everyday satisfaction of economic needs can be reconciled with the final result of the overthrow of the social system by relying on an organisational form to solve the old antithesis between limited and gradual conquests and the maximum revolutionary program. But – as was rightly said in one of the resolutions of the majority of the German Communist Party at a time when these questions (which later provoked the secession of the KAPD) were particularly acute in Germany – revolution is not a question of the form of organisation. Revolution requires an organisation of active and positive forces united by a doctrine and a final aim. Important strata and innumerable individuals will remain outside this organisation even though they materially belong to the class in whose interest the revolution will triumph. But the class lives, struggles, progresses and wins thanks to the action of the forces it has engendered from its womb in the pains of history. The class originates from an immediate homogeneity of economic conditions which appear to us as the primary motive force of the tendency to destroy and go beyond the present mode of production. But in order to assume this great task, the class must have its own thought, its own critical method, its own will bent on the precise ends defined by research and criticism, and its own organisation of struggle channelling and utilising with the utmost efficiency its collective efforts and sacrifices. All this constitutes the Party.

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[Bordiga Archive](http://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1921/party-class.htm)

Amadeo Bordiga. 1921

## Party and class action

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In a previous article where we elaborated certain fundamental theoretical concepts, we have shown not only that there is no contradiction in the fact that the political party of the working class, the indispensable instrument in the struggles for the emancipation of this class, includes in its ranks only a part, a minority, of the class, but we also have shown that we cannot speak of a class in historical movement without the existence of a party which has a precise consciousness of this movement and its aims, and which places itself at the vanguard of this movement in the struggle.

A more detailed examination of the historical tasks of the working class on its revolutionary course, both before and after the overthrow of the power of the exploiters, will only confirm the imperative necessity of a political party which must direct the whole struggle of the working class. In order to have a precise, tangible idea of the technical necessity of the party, we should first consider – even if it may seem illogical – the tasks that the proletariat must accomplish after having come to power and after having wrenched the control of the social machine from the bourgeoisie.

After having conquered control of the state the proletariat must undertake complex functions. In addition to replacing the bourgeoisie in the direction and administration of public matters, it must construct an entirely new and different administrative and governmental machinery, with immensely more complex aims than those comprising the “governmental art” of today. These functions require a regimentation of individuals capable of performing diverse functions, of studying various problems, and of applying certain criteria to the different sectors of collective life: these criteria are derived from the general revolutionary principles and correspond to the necessity which compels the proletarian class to break the bonds of the old regime in order to set up new social relationships.

It would be a fundamental mistake to believe that such a degree of preparation and specialisation could be achieved merely by organising the workers on a trade basis according to their traditional functions in the old regime. Our task will not be to eliminate the contribution of technical competence previously furnished by the capitalist or by elements closely linked to him in order to replace them, factory by factory, by the training and experience of the best workers. We will instead have to confront tasks of a much more complex nature which require a synthesis

of political, administrative and military preparation. Such a preparation, which must exactly correspond to the precise historical tasks of the proletarian revolution, can be guaranteed only by the political party; in effect the political party is the only organism which possesses on one hand a general historical vision of the revolutionary process and of its necessities and on the other hand a strict organisational discipline ensuring the complete subordination of all its particular functions to the final general aim of the class.

A party is that collection of people who have the same general view of the development of history, who have a precise conception of the final aim of the class they represent, and who have prepared in advance a system of solutions to the various problems which the proletariat will have to confront when it becomes the ruling class. It is for this reason that the rule of the class can only be the rule of the party. After these brief considerations, which can very evidently be seen in even a superficial study of the Russian Revolution, we shall now consider the phase preceding the proletariat's rise to power in order to demonstrate that the revolutionary action of the class against bourgeois power can only be a party action.

It is first of all evident that the proletariat would not be mature enough to confront the extremely difficult problems of the period of its dictatorship, if the organ that is indispensable in solving these problems, the party, had not begun long before to constitute the body of its doctrine and experiences.

The party is the indispensable organ of all class action even if we consider the immediate necessities of the struggles which must culminate in the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie. In fact we cannot speak of a genuine class action (that is an action that goes beyond the trade interests and immediate concerns) unless there is a party action.



Basically, the task of the proletarian party in the historical process is set forth as follows.

At all times the economic and social relationships in capitalist society are unbearable for the proletarians, who consequently are driven to try to overcome them. Through complex developments the victims of these relationships are brought to realise that, in their instinctive struggle against sufferings and hardships which are common to a multitude of people, individual resources are not enough. Hence they are led to experiment with collective forms of action in order to increase, through their association, the extent of their influence on the social conditions imposed upon them. But the succession of these experiences all along the path of the development of the present capitalist social form leads to the inevitable conclusion that the workers will achieve no real influence on their own destinies until they have united their efforts beyond the limits of local, national and trade interests and until they have concentrated these

efforts on a far-reaching and integral objective which is realised in the overthrow of bourgeois political power. This is so because as long as the present political apparatus remains in force, its function will be to annihilate all the efforts of the proletarian class to escape from capitalist exploitation.

The first groups of proletarians to attain this consciousness are those who take part in the movements of their class comrades and who, through a critical analysis of their efforts, of the results which follow, and of their mistakes and disillusion, bring an ever-growing number of proletarians onto the field of the common and final struggle which is a struggle for power, a political struggle, a revolutionary struggle.

Thus at first an ever-increasing number of workers become convinced that only the final revolutionary struggle can solve the problem of their living conditions. At the same time there are increasing numbers who are ready to accept the inevitable hardships and sacrifices of the struggle and who are ready to put themselves at the head of the masses incited to revolt by their suffering, all in order to rationally utilise their efforts and to assure their full effectiveness.

The indispensable task of the party therefore is presented in two ways, that is first as a factor of consciousness and then as a factor of will. The first results in the theoretical conception of the revolutionary process that must be shared by all its adherents; the second brings a precise discipline which secures the co-ordination and thus the success of the action.

Obviously this strengthening of the class energies has never been and can never be a securely progressive, continuous process. There are standstills, setbacks and disbandings. Proletarian parties often lose the essential characteristics which they were in the process of forming and their aptitude for fulfilling their historical tasks. In general, under the very influence of particular phenomena of the capitalist world, parties often abandon their principal function which is to concentrate and channel the impulses originating from the movement of the various groups, and to direct them towards the single final aim of the revolution. Such parties are satisfied with immediate and transitory solutions and satisfactions. They degenerate in their theory and practice to the point of admitting that the proletariat can find conditions of advantageous equilibrium within the capitalist regime, and they adopt as their political aim objectives which are merely partial and immediate, thereby beginning on their way towards class collaboration.

These phenomena of degeneration reached their peak with the great World War. After this a period of healthy reaction has followed: the class parties inspired by revolutionary directives – which are the only parties that are truly class parties – have been reconstructed throughout the world and are organising themselves into the Third International, whose doctrine and action are explicitly revolutionary and “maximalist”.

Thus in this period, which everything indicates will be decisive, we can see again a

movement of revolutionary unification of the masses, of organisation of their forces for the final revolutionary action. But once again, far from having the immediate simplicity of a rule, this situation poses difficult tactical problems; it does not exclude partial or even serious failure, and it raises questions which so greatly impassion the militants of the world revolutionary organisation.



Now that the new International has systematised the framework of its doctrine it must still draw up a general plan of its tactical methods. In various countries a series of questions has arisen from the communist movement and tactical problems are on the order of the day. Once it has been established that the political party is an indispensable organ of the revolution; once it no longer can be a point of debate that the party can only be a part of the class (and this point has been settled in the theoretical resolutions of the Second World Congress, which formed the point of departure of the previous article) (1) then the following problem remains to be solved: we must know more precisely how large the party organisation must be and what relationship it must have with the masses which it organises and leads.

There exists – or there is said to exist – a trend which wishes to have perfectly pure “small parties” and which would almost take pleasure in moving away from contact with the great masses, accusing them of having little revolutionary consciousness and capabilities. This tendency is severely criticised and is defined as deft opportunism. This label however seems to us to be more demagogic than justified; it should rather be reserved for those tendencies that deny the function of the political party and pretend that the masses can be organised on a vast scale for revolution by means of purely economic and syndical forms of organisation.

What we must deal with therefore is a more thorough examination of the relationship between the masses and the party. We have seen that the party is only a part of the working class, but how are we to determine the numerical size of this “proportion”? For us if there is a proof of “voluntarism” and therefore of typical anti- Marxist opportunism (and today opportunism can only mean heresy) it is the pretension of establishing such a numerical relationship as an a priori rule of organisation; that is to say of establishing that the communist party must have in its ranks, or as sympathisers, a certain number of workers which is either greater or less than a particular given percentage of the proletarian mass.

It would be a ridiculous mistake to judge the process of formation of communist parties, which proceeds through splits and mergers, according to a numerical criterion, that is to say to cut down the size of the parties which are too large and to forcibly add to the numbers of the parties which are too small. This would be in effect not to understand that this formation must be guided instead by qualitative and political norms and that it develops in a very large part

through the dialectical repercussions of history. It cannot be defined by organisational rules which would pretend that the parties should be moulded into what is considered to be desirable and appropriate dimensions.

What can be stated as an unquestionable basis for such a discussion on tactics is that it is preferable that the parties should be numerically as large as possible and that they should succeed in attracting around them the largest possible strata of the masses. No one among the communists ever laid down as a principle that the communist party should be composed of a small number of people shut up in an ivory tower of political purity. It is indisputable that the numerical force of the party and the enthusiasm of the proletariat to gather around the party are favourable revolutionary conditions; they are unmistakable signs of the maturity of the development of proletarian energies and nobody would ever wish that the communist parties should not progress in that way.

Therefore there is no definite or definable numerical relationship between the party membership and the great mass of the workers. Once it is established that the party assumes its function as a minority of the class, the inquiry as to whether this should be a large minority or a small minority is the ultimate in pedantry. It is certain that as long as the contradictions and internal conflicts of capitalist society, from which the revolutionary tendencies originate, are only in their first stage of development, as long as the revolution appears to be far away, then we must expect this situation: the class party, the communist party, will necessarily be composed of small vanguard groups who have a special capacity to understand the historical perspective, and that section of the masses who will understand and follow it cannot be very large. However, when the revolutionary crisis becomes imminent, when the bourgeois relations of production become more and more intolerable, the party will see an increase in its ranks and in the extent of its following within the proletariat.

If the present period is a revolutionary one, as all communists are firmly convinced, then it follows that we must have large parties which exercise a strong influence over broad sections of the proletariat in every country. But wherever this aim has not yet been realised in spite of undeniable proofs of the acuteness of the crisis and the imminence of its outburst, the causes of this deficiency are very complex; therefore it would be extremely frivolous to conclude that the party, when it is too small and with little influence, must be artificially extended by fusing with other parties or fractions of parties which have members that are supposedly linked to the masses. The decision as to whether members of other organisations should be admitted into the ranks of the party, or on the contrary whether a party which is too large should eliminate part of its membership, cannot stem from arithmetical considerations or from a childish statistical disappointment.

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The formation of the communist parties, with the exception of the Russian Bolshevik Party, has grown at a very accelerated pace in Europe as well as outside of Europe because the war has opened the door, at a very accelerated rate, to a crisis of the system. The proletarian masses cannot attain a firm political consciousness in a gradual way; on the contrary they are driven here and there by the necessities of the revolutionary struggle, as if they were tossed by the waves of a stormy sea. There has continued to survive, on the other hand, the traditional influence of social- democratic methods, and the social-democratic parties themselves are still on the scene in order to sabotage the process of clarification, to the greatest advantage of the bourgeoisie.

When the problem of how to solve the crisis reaches the critical point and when the question of power is posed to the masses, the role of the social-democrats becomes extremely evident, for when the dilemma proletarian dictatorship or bourgeois dictatorship is posed and when choice can no longer be avoided, they choose complicity with the bourgeoisie. However when the situation is maturing but not yet fully developed, a considerable section of the masses remain under the influence of these social-traitors. And in those cases when the probability of revolution has the appearance, but only the appearance, of diminishing, or when the bourgeoisie unexpectedly begins to unfurl its forces of resistance, it is inevitable that the communist parties will temporarily lose ground in the field of organisation and in their leadership of the masses.

Given the present unstable situation, it is possible that we will see such fluctuations in the generally secure process of development of the revolutionary International. It is unquestionable that communist tactics must try to face these unfavourable circumstances, but it is no less certain that it would be absurd to hope to eliminate them by mere tactical formulas, just as it would be excessive to draw pessimistic conclusions from these circumstances.

In the abstract hypothesis of the continuous development of the revolutionary energies of the masses, the party sees its numerical and political forces increase in a continuous way, quantitatively growing but remaining qualitatively the same, inasmuch as the number of communists rises, in relation to the total number of proletarians. However in the actual situation the diverse and continually changing factors of the social environment act upon the mood of the masses in a complex way; the communist party, which is made up of those who more clearly perceive and understand the characteristics of the historical development, nevertheless does not cease to be an effect of this development and thus it cannot escape fluctuations in the social atmosphere. Therefore, although it acts constantly as a factor of revolutionary acceleration, there is no method it can use, however refined it may be, which can force or reverse the situation in regards to its fundamental essence.

The worst remedy which could be used against unfavourable consequences of situations, however, would be to periodically put on trial the theoretical and organisational principles that are the very basis of the party, with the objective of enlarging its zone of contact with the

masses. In situations where the revolutionary inclinations of the masses are weakening, this movement to “bring the party towards the masses”, as some call it, is very often equivalent to changing the very nature of the party, thus depriving it of the very qualities that would enable it to be a catalyst capable of influencing the masses to resume their forward movement.

The conclusions in regard to the precise character of the revolutionary process, which are derived from the doctrine and historical experience, can only be international and thus result in international standards. Once the communist parties are solidly founded on these conclusions, then their organisational physiognomy must be considered to be established and it must be understood that their ability to attract the masses and to give them their full class power depends on their adherence to a strict discipline regarding the program and the internal organisation.

The communist party possesses a theoretical consciousness confirmed by the movement’s international experiences, which enables it to be prepared to confront the demands of revolutionary struggle. And because of this, even though the masses partially abandon it during certain phases of its life, it has a guarantee that their support will return when they are confronted with revolutionary problems for which there can be no other solution than that inscribed in the party’s program. When the necessities of revolutionary action reveal the need for a centralised and disciplined organ of leadership, then the communist party, whose constitution will have obeyed these principles, will put itself at the head of the masses in movement.

The conclusion that we wish to draw is that the criteria which we must use as a basis to judge the efficiency of the communist parties must be quite different from an a posteriori estimate of their numerical forces as compared with those of the other parties which claim to represent the proletariat. The only criteria by which to judge this efficiency are the precisely defined theoretical bases of the party’s program and the rigid internal discipline of all its organisational sections and of all its members; only such a discipline can guarantee the utilisation of everyone’s work for the greatest success of the revolutionary cause. Any other form of intervention in the composition of the party which is not logically derived from the precise application of these principles can only lead to illusory results and would deprive the class party of its greatest revolutionary strength: this strength lies precisely in the doctrinal and organisational continuity of all its propaganda and all its action, in its ability to state in advance, how the process of the final struggle between classes will develop and in its ability to give itself the type of organisation which responds to the needs of this decisive phase.

During the war, this continuity was irretrievably lost throughout the world and the only thing to do was to start again from the beginning. The birth of the Communist International as a historical force has materialised, on the basis of a perfectly clear and decisive revolutionary experience, the lines on which the proletarian movement could reorganise itself. The first condition for a revolutionary victory for the world proletariat is consequently the attainment of

the organisational stabilisation of the International, which could give the masses throughout the world a feeling of determination and certitude, and which could win the support of the masses while making it possible to wait for them whenever it is indispensable that the development of the crisis still should act upon them, that is when it is unavoidable that they still experiment with the insidious advice of the social-democrats. There do not exist any better recipes for escaping this necessity.

The Second Congress of the Third International understood these necessities. At the beginning of a new epoch which must lead to revolution, it had to establish the points of departure of an international work of organisation and revolutionary preparation. It would have perhaps been preferable for the Congress, instead of dealing with the different themes in the order that they were treated in the theses – all of which dealt with theory and tactics at the same time – to have established first the fundamental basis of the theoretical and programmatic conception of communism, since the organisation of all adhering parties must be primarily based on the acceptance of these theses. The Congress then would have formulated the fundamental rules of action which all members must strictly observe on the trade-union, the agrarian, and the colonial questions and so on. However, all this is dealt with in the body of resolutions adopted by the Second Congress and is excellently summarised in the theses on the conditions of admission of the parties (2).

It is essential to consider the application of these conditions of admission as an initial constitutive and organisational act of the International, that is as an operation which must be accomplished once and for all in order to draw all organised or organisable forces out of the chaos into which the political proletarian movement had fallen, and to organise these forces into the new International.

All steps should be taken without further delay in order to organise the international movement on the basis of these obligatory international standards. For, as we have said before, the great strength which must guide the International in its task of propelling the revolutionary energies is the demonstration of the continuity of its thought and action towards a precise aim that will one day appear clearly in the eyes of the masses, polarising them around the vanguard party, and providing the best chances for the victory of the revolution.

If, as a result of this initial – though organisationally decisive – systematisation of the movement, parties in certain countries have an apparently small membership, then it can be very useful to study the causes of such a phenomenon. However it would be absurd to modify the established organisational standards and to redefine their application with the aim of obtaining a better numerical relationship of the Communist Party to the masses or to other parties. This would only annihilate all the work accomplished in the period of organisation and would make it useless; it would necessitate beginning the work of preparation all over again, with the supplementary risk of several other starts. Thus this method would only result in losing time

instead of saving it.

This is all the more true if the international consequences of this method are considered. The result of making the international organisational rules revocable and of creating precedents for accepting the “remoulding” of parties – as if a party was like a statue which could be recast after not turning out well the first time — would be to obliterate all the prestige and authority of the “conditions” that the International laid down for the parties and individuals that wished to join. This would also indefinitely delay the stabilisation of the staff of the revolutionary army, since new officers could constantly aspire to enter while “retaining the privileges of their rank”.

Therefore it is not necessary to be in favour of large — or small- parties; it is not necessary to advocate that the orientation of certain parties should be reversed, under the pretext that they are not “mass parties”. On the contrary, we must demand that all communist parties be founded on sound organisational, programmatic, and tactical directives which crystallise the results of the best experiences of the revolutionary struggle on the international scale.

These conclusions, although it is difficult to make it evident without very long considerations and quotations of facts taken from the life of the proletarian movement, do not spring from an abstract and sterile desire to have pure, perfect and orthodox parties. Instead they originate from a desire to fulfil the revolutionary tasks of the class party in the most efficient and secure way.

The party will never find such a secure support from the masses, the masses will never find a more secure defender of their class consciousness and of their power, than when the past actions of the party have shown the continuity of its movement towards revolutionary aims, even without the masses or against them at certain unfavourable moments. The support of the masses can be securely won only by a struggle against their opportunist leaders. This means that where non-communist parties still exert an influence among the masses, the masses must be won over by dismantling the organisational network of these parties and by absorbing their proletarian elements into the solid and well-defined organisation of the Communist Party. This is the only method which can give useful solutions and can assure practical success. It corresponds exactly to Marx’s and Engels’ positions towards the dissident movement of the Lassalians.

That is why the Communist International must look with extreme mistrust at all groups and individuals who come to it with theoretical and tactical reservations. We may recognise that this mistrust cannot be absolutely uniform on the international level and that certain special conditions must be taken into account in countries where only limited forces actually place themselves on the true terrain of communism. It remains true, however, that no importance should be given to the numerical size of the party when it is a question of whether the conditions of admission should be made more lenient or more severe for individuals and, with still more reason, for groups who are more or less incompletely won over to the theses and methods of the International. The acquisition of these elements would not be the acquisition of positive forces;

instead of bringing new masses to us, this would result in the risk of jeopardising the clear process of winning them over to the cause of the party. Of course we must want this process to be as rapid as possible, but this wish must not urge us on to incautious actions which might, on the contrary, delay the final solid and definitive success.

It is necessary to incorporate certain norms which have constantly proved to be very efficient into the tactics of the International, into the fundamental criteria which dictate the application of these tactics, and into the solution of the complex problems which arise in practice. These are: an absolutely uncompromising attitude towards other parties, even the closest ones, keeping in mind the future repercussions beyond immediate desires to hasten the development of certain situations; the discipline that is required of members, taking into consideration not only their present observance of this discipline but also their past actions, with the maximum mistrust in regard to political conversions; a consideration of the past accountability of individuals and groups, in place of recognising their right to join or to leave the communist army whenever they please. All this, even if it may seem to enclose the party in too narrow a circle for the moment, is not a theoretical luxury but instead it is a tactical method which very securely ensures the future.

Countless examples would show that last-minute revolutionaries are out of place and useless in our ranks. Only yesterday they had reformist attitudes that were dictated by the special conditions of the period and today they have been led to follow the fundamental communist directive because they are influenced by their often too optimistic considerations about the imminence of the revolution. Any new wavering in the situation — and in a war who can say how many advances and retreats would occur before the final victory — will be sufficient to cause them to return to their old opportunism, thus jeopardising at the same time the contents of our organisation.

The international communist movement must be composed of those who not only are firmly convinced of the necessity of revolution and are ready to struggle for it at the cost of any sacrifice, but who also are committed to act on the revolutionary terrain even when the difficulties of the struggle reveal that their aim is harder to reach and further away than they had believed.

At the moment of the intense revolutionary crisis we shall act on the sound base of our international organisation, polarising around us the elements who today are still hesitating, and defeating the social-democratic parties of various shades.

If the revolutionary possibilities are less immediate we will not run the risk, even for a single moment, of letting ourselves be distracted from our patient work of preparation in order to retreat to the mere solving of immediate problems, which would only benefit the bourgeoisie.



Another aspect of the tactical problem which the communist parties must solve is that of choosing the moment at which the calls for action must be launched, whether it is a secondary action or the final one.

This is why the tactics of the offensive of communist parties are passionately discussed today; these consist of organising and arming the party militants and the close sympathisers, and of manoeuvring them at the opportune moment in offensive actions aiming at rousing the masses in a general movement, or even at accomplishing spectacular actions in response to the reactionary offensive of the bourgeoisie.

On this question too there are generally two opposing positions neither of which a communist would probably support.

No communist can harbour prejudices towards the use of armed actions, retaliations and even terror or deny that these actions, which require discipline and organisation, must be directed by the communist party. Just as infantile is the conception that the use of violence and armed actions are reserved for the “Great Day” when the supreme struggle for the conquest of power will be launched. In the reality of the revolutionary development, bloody confrontations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are inevitable before the final struggle; they may originate not only from unsuccessful insurrectional attempts on the part of the proletariat, but also from inevitable, partial and transitory clashes between the forces of bourgeois defence and groups of proletarians who have been impelled to rise in arms, or between bands of bourgeois “white guards” and workers who have been attacked and provoked by them. It is not correct either to say that communist parties must disavow all such actions and reserve all their force for the final moment, because all struggles necessitate a preparation and a period of training and it is in these preliminary actions that the revolutionary capacity of the party to lead and organise the masses must begin to be forged and tested.

It would be a mistake, however, to deduce from all these preceding considerations that the action of the political class party is merely that of a general staff which could by its mere will, determine the movement of the armed forces and their utilisation. And it would be an imaginary tactical perspective to believe that the party, after having created a military organisation, could launch an attack at a given moment when it would judge its strength to be sufficient to defeat the forces of bourgeois defence.

The offensive action of the party is conceivable only when the reality of the economic and social situation throws the masses into a movement aimed at solving the problems directly related, on the widest scale, to their conditions in life; this movement creates an unrest which can only develop in a truly revolutionary direction on the condition that the party intervenes by

clearly establishing its general aims, and rationally and efficiently organising its action, including the military technique. It is certain that the party's revolutionary preparation can begin to translate itself into planned actions even in the partial movements of the masses: thus retaliation against white terror – whose aims are to give the proletariat the feeling that it is definitively weaker than its adversaries and to make it abandon the revolutionary preparation – is an indispensable tactical means.

However it would be another voluntarist error – for which there cannot and must not be any room in the methods of the Marxist International – to believe that by utilising such military forces, even though they may be extremely well organised on a broad scale, it is possible to change the situations and to provoke the starting of the general revolutionary struggle in the midst of a stagnating situation.

One can create neither parties nor revolutions; one leads the parties and the revolutions, by unifying all the useful international revolutionary experiences in order to secure the greatest chances of victory of the proletariat in the battle which is the inevitable outcome of the historical epoch in which we live. This is what seems to us to be the necessary conclusion.

The fundamental criteria which direct the action of the masses are expressed in the organisational and tactical rules which the International must fix for all member- parties. But these criteria cannot go as far as to directly reshape the parties with the illusion of giving them all the dimensions and characteristics that would guarantee the success of the revolution. They must, instead, be inspired by Marxist dialectics and based above all on the programmatic clarity and homogeneity on one hand, and on the centralising tactical discipline on the other.

There are in our opinion two “opportunistic” deviations from the correct path. The first one consists of deducing the nature and characteristics of the party on the basis of whether or not it is possible, in a given situation, to regroup numerous forces: this amounts to having the party's organisational rules dictated by situations and to giving it, from the outside, a constitution different from that which it has attained in a particular situation. The second deviation consists of believing that a party, provided it is numerically large and has achieved a military preparation, can provoke revolutionary situations by giving an order to attack: this amounts to asserting that historical situations can be created by the will of the party.

Regardless of which deviation should be called “right wing” or left wings it is certain that both are far removed from the correct Marxist doctrine. The first deviation renounces what can and must be the legitimate intervention of the international movement with a systematic body of organisational and tactical rules; it renounces that degree of influence – which derives from a precise consciousness and historical experience – that our will can and must exercise on the development of the revolutionary process. The second deviation attributes an excessive and unreal importance to the will of the minorities, which results in the risk of leading to disastrous

defeats.

Communist revolutionaries must be those who on the contrary have been collectively tempered by the experiences of the struggle against the degenerations of the proletarian movement, who firmly believe in the revolution, and who strongly desire it, but not like someone who would expect a payment and would sink into despair and discouragement if the due date was to be delayed for only one day.

## Notes:

1. See "Party and Class" 2. See The Conditions of Admission to the Communist International (in English) in Programme Communiste no. 65, December 1974.

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Amadeo Bordiga 1922

# The Democratic Principle

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The use of certain terms in the exposition of the problems of communism very often engenders ambiguities because of the different meanings these terms may be given. Such is the case with the words *democracy* and *democratic*. In its statements of principle, Marxist communism presents itself as a critique and a negation of democracy; yet communists often defend the democratic character of proletarian organizations (the state system of workers' councils, trade unions and the party) and the application of democracy within them. There is certainly no contradiction in this, and no objection can be made to the use of the dilemma, "either bourgeois democracy or proletarian democracy" as a perfect equivalent to the formula "bourgeois democracy or proletarian dictatorship".

The Marxist critique of the postulates of bourgeois democracy is in fact based on the definition of the class character of modern society. It demonstrates the theoretical inconsistency and the practical deception of a system which pretends to reconcile political equality with the division of society into social classes determined by the nature of the mode of production.

Political freedom and equality, which, according to the theory of liberalism, are expressed in the right to vote, have no meaning except on a basis that excludes inequality of fundamental economic conditions. For this reason we communists accept their application within the class organizations of the proletariat and contend that they should function democratically.

In order to avoid creating ambiguities, and dignifying the concept of democracy, so entrenched in the prevailing ideology which we strive relentlessly to demolish, it would be desirable to use a different term in each of the two cases. Even if we do not do this, it is nonetheless useful to look a little further into the very content of the democratic principle, both in general and in its application to homogeneous class organs. This is necessary to eliminate the danger of again raising the democratic principle to an absolute principle of truth and justice. Such a relapse into apriorism would introduce an element foreign to our entire theoretical framework at the very moment when we are trying, by means of our critique, to sweep away the deceptive and arbitrary content of "liberal" theories.

# I

A theoretical error is always at the root of an error of political tactics. In other words, it is the translation of the tactical error into the language of our collective critical consciousness. Thus the pernicious politics and tactics of social-democracy are reflected in the error of principle that presents socialism as the inheritor of a substantial part of the doctrine that liberalism opposed to the old spiritualist doctrines. In reality, far from ever accepting and completing the critique that democratic liberalism had raised against the aristocratic and absolute monarchies of the *ancien regime*, Marxist socialism in its earliest formulations demolished it utterly. It did so not to defend the spiritualist or idealist doctrine against the Voltairean materialism of the bourgeois revolutionaries, but to demonstrate how the theoreticians of bourgeois materialism had in reality only deluded themselves when they imagined that the political philosophy of the Encyclopedists had led them out of the mists of metaphysics and idealist nonsense. In fact, like all their predecessors, they had to surrender to the genuinely objective critique of social and historical phenomena provided by Marx's historical materialism.

It is also important from a theoretical point of view to demonstrate that no idealist or neo-idealist revision of our principles is needed to deepen the abyss between socialism and bourgeois democracy, to restore to the theory of proletarian revolution its powerfully revolutionary content which had been adulterated by the falsifications of those who fornicate with bourgeois democracy. It is enough merely to refer to the positions taken by the founders of Marxism in the face of the lies of liberal doctrines and of bourgeois materialism.

To return to our argument, we will show that the socialist critique of democracy was in essence a critique of the democratic critique of the old political philosophies. Marxism denies their alleged universal opposition and demonstrates that in reality they are theoretically similar, just as in practise the proletariat did not have much reason to celebrate when the direction of society passed from the hands of the feudal, monarchical and religious nobility into the hands of the young commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. And the theoretical demonstration that the new bourgeois philosophy had not overcome the old errors of the despotic regimes, but was itself only an edifice of new sophisms, corresponded concretely to the appearance of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat which contained the negation of the bourgeois claim of having forever established the administration of society on a peaceful and infinitely perfectible basis, thanks to the introduction of suffrage and of parliamentary democracy.

The old political doctrines based on spiritualist concepts or even on religious revelation claimed that the supernatural forces which govern the consciousness and the will of men had assigned to certain individuals, families or castes, the task of ruling and managing the collective existence, making them the repositories of "authority" by divine right. To this, the democratic philosophy which asserted itself at the time of the bourgeois revolution counterposed the

proclamation of the moral, political and juridical equality of all citizens, whether they were nobles, clerics or plebeians. It sought to transfer "sovereignty" from the narrow sphere of caste or dynasty to the universal sphere of popular consultation based on suffrage which allowed a majority of the citizens to designate the leaders of the state, according to its will.

The thunderbolts hurled against this conception by the priests of all religions and by spiritualist philosophers do not suffice to give it recognition as the definitive victory of truth over obscurantist error, even if the "rationalism" of this political philosophy seemed for a long time to be the last word in social science and the art of politics, and even if many would-be socialists proclaimed their solidarity with it. This claim that the time of "privilege" was over, once a system with its social hierarchy based on the consent of the majority of electors had been set up, does not withstand the Marxist critique, which throws a completely different light on the nature of social phenomena. This claim may look like an attractive logical construction only if it is admitted from the outset that the *vote*, that is, the judgement, the opinion, the consciousness of each elector has the same weight in delegating power for the administration of the collective business. It is already evident that this conception is unrealistic and unmaterialist because it considers each individual to be a perfect "unit" within a system made up of many potentially equivalent units, and instead of appraising the value of the individual's opinion in the light of his manifold conditions of existence, that is, his relations with others, it postulates this value *a priori* with the hypothesis of the "sovereignty" of the individual. Again this amounts to denying that the consciousness of men is a concrete reflection of the facts and material conditions of their existence, to viewing it as a spark ignited with the same providential fairness in each organism, healthy or impaired, tormented or harmoniously satisfied in all its needs, by some undefinable supreme bestower of life. In the democratic theory, this supreme being no longer designates a monarch, but confers on everyone the equal capacity to do so! In spite of its rationalist front, the democratic theory rests on a no less childish metaphysical premise than does "free will", which, according to the catholic doctrine of the afterlife, wins men either damnation or salvation. Because it places itself outside of time and historical contingencies, the democratic theory is no less tainted with spiritualism than are the equally erroneous philosophies of revelation and monarchy by divine right.

To further extend this comparison, it is sufficient to remember that many centuries before the French Revolution and the declaration of the rights of man and citizen, the democratic political doctrine had been advanced by thinkers who took their stand resolutely on the terrain of idealism and metaphysical philosophy. Moreover, if the French Revolution toppled the altars of the Christian god in the name of Reason, it was, wittingly or not, only to make Reason into a new divinity.

This metaphysical presupposition, incompatible with the Marxist critique, is characteristic not only of the doctrine constructed by bourgeois liberalism, but also of all the constitutional doctrines and plans for a new society based on the "intrinsic value" of certain schemes of social

and state relations. In building its own doctrine of history, Marxism in fact demolished medieval idealism, bourgeois liberalism and utopian socialism with a single blow.

## II

To these arbitrary constructions of social constitutions, whether aristocratic or democratic, authoritarian or liberal, as well as to the anarchist conception of a society without hierarchy or delegation of power, which is rooted in analogous errors, the communist critique opposed a much more thorough study of the nature and causes of social relations in their complex evolution throughout human history and a careful analysis of their characteristics in the present capitalist epoch from which it drew a series of reasoned hypotheses about their further evolution. To this can now be added the enormous theoretical and practical contribution of the proletarian revolution in Russia.

It would be superfluous here to develop the well-known concepts of economic determinism and the arguments which justify its use in interpreting historical events and the social dynamic. The apriorism common to conservatives and utopians is eliminated by the analysis of factors rooted in production, the economy, and the class relations they determine. This makes possible a scientific explanation of the juridical, political, military, religious and cultural facts which make up the diverse manifestations of social life.

We will merely retrace the historical evolution of the mode of social organization and grouping of men, not only in the state, an abstract representation of a collectivity fusing together all individuals, but also in other organizations which arise from the relations between men.

The basis of the interpretation of every social hierarchy, whether extended or limited, is the relations between different individuals, and the basis of these relations is the division of tasks and functions among these individuals.

We can imagine without serious error that at the beginning the human species existed in a completely unorganized form. Still few in number, these individuals could live from the products of nature without the application of technology or labour and in such conditions could do without their fellow beings. The only existing relations, common to all species, were those of reproduction. But for the human species - and not only for it - these were already sufficient to form a system of relations with its own hierarchy - the family. This could be based on polygamy, polyandry or monogamy. We will not enter into a detailed analysis here; let us say only that the family represents an embryo of organized collective life, based on a division of functions directly determined by physiological factors, since the mother nourished and raised the children, and the father devoted himself to the hunt, to the acquisition of plunder and to the protection of the family from external enemies, etc.

In this initial phase, where production and economy are almost totally absent, as well as in later stages when they are developing, it is useless to dwell on the abstract question of whether we are dealing with the individual-unit or the society-unit. Without any doubt, the individual is a unit from a biological point of view, but one cannot make this individual the basis of social organization without falling into metaphysical nonsense. From a social perspective, all the individual units do not have the same value. The collectivity is born from relations and groupings in which the status and activity of each individual do not derive from an individual function but from a collective one determined by the multiple influences of the social milieu. Even in the elementary case of an unorganized society or non-society, the simple physiological basis which produces family organization is already sufficient to refute the arbitrary doctrine of the individual as an indivisible unit free to combine with other fellow units, without ceasing to be distinct from, yet somehow, equivalent to them. In this case, obviously the society-unit does not exist either, since relations between men, even reduced to the simple notion that others exist, are extremely limited and restricted to the sphere of the family or the clan. The self-evident conclusion can be drawn in advance: the society-unit has never existed and probably never will except as a "limit" which can be brought progressively nearer by the disappearance of the boundaries of classes and states.

Setting out from the individual-unit in order to draw social conclusions and to construct social blueprints or even in order to deny society, is setting out from an unreal supposition which, even in its most modern formulations, only amounts to refurbishing the concepts of religious revelation and creation and of a spiritual life which is not dependent upon natural and organic life. The divine creator - or a single power governing the destiny of the universe has given each individual this elementary property of being an autonomous well-defined molecule endowed with consciousness, will and responsibility within the social aggregate, independent of contingent factors deriving from the physical influence of the environment. Only the appearance of this religious and idealist conception is modified in the doctrine of democratic liberalism or libertarian individualism. The soul as a spark from the supreme Being, the subjective sovereignty of each elector, or the unlimited autonomy of the citizen of a society without laws - these are so many sophisms which, in the eyes of the Marxist critique, are tainted with the same infantile idealism, no matter how resolutely "materialist" the first bourgeois liberals and anarchists may have been.

This conception finds its match in the equally idealist hypothesis of the perfect social unit - of social monism - based on the divine will which is supposed to govern and administer the life of our species. Returning to the primitive stage of social life which we were considering and to the family organization discovered there, we conclude that we do not need such metaphysical hypotheses of the individual-unit and the society-unit in order to interpret the life of the species and the process of its evolution. On the other hand, we can positively state that we are dealing with a type of *collectivity organized on a unitary basis*, i.e. the family. We take care not to

make this a fixed or permanent type or to idealize it as the model form of the social collectivity, as anarchism or absolute monarchy do with the individual. Rather we simply record the existence of the family as the primary unit of human organization, which will be succeeded by others, which itself will be modified in many aspects, and which will become a constituent element of other collective organizations, or, one may suppose, will disappear in very advanced social forms. We do not feel at all obliged to be for or against the family in principle, any more than, for example, for or against the state. What does concern us is to grasp the evolutionary direction of these types of human organization. When we ask ourselves whether they will disappear one day, we do so objectively, because it could not occur to us to think of them as sacred and eternal, or as pernicious and to be destroyed. Conservatism and its opposite (i.e. the negation of every form of organization and social hierarchy) are equally weak from a critical view-point, and equally sterile.

Thus leaving aside the traditional opposition between the categories individual and society, we follow the formation and the evolution of other *units* in our study of human history: organized human collectivities, broad or restricted groupings of men with a hierarchy based on a division of functions, which appear as the real factors and agents of social life. Such units can in a certain sense be compared to organic units, to living organisms whose cells, with their different functions and values, can be represented by men or by rudimentary groups of men. However the analogy is not complete, since while a living organism has well-defined limits and obeys the inflexible biological laws of its growth and death, organized social units do not have fixed boundaries and are continually being renewed, mingling with one another, simultaneously splitting and recombining. If we dwelt on the first conspicuous example of the family unit, it was to demonstrate the following: if these units which we are considering are clearly composed of individuals and if their very composition is variable, they nonetheless behave like organic and integral "wholes", such that to split them into individual units has no real meaning and is tantamount to a myth. The family element constitutes a whole whose life does not depend on the number of individuals that comprise it, but on the network of their relationships. To take a crude example, a family composed of the head, the wives and a few feeble old men is not equal to another made up of its head and many strong young men.

Setting out from the family, the first organized social form, where one finds the first example of division of functions, the first hierarchies, the first forms of authority and the direction of individuals' activities and the administration of things, human evolution passes through an infinite series of other organizational forms, increasingly broad and complex. The reason for this increasing complexity lies in the growing complexity of social relations and hierarchies born from the ever-increasing differentiation between functions. The latter is directly determined by the systems of production that technology and science place at the disposal of human activity in order to provide an increasing number of products suited to satisfying the needs of larger societies evolving towards higher forms of life. An analysis which seeks to understand the

process of formation and change of different human organizations, as well as the interplay of relations within the whole of society, must be based on the notion of the development of productive technology and the economic relations which arise from the distribution of individuals among the different tasks required by the productive mechanism. The formation and evolution of dynasties, castes, armies, states, empires, corporations and parties can and must be studied on the basis of these elements. One can imagine that at the highest point of this complex development a kind of organized unit will appear which will encompass all of mankind and which will establish a rational division of functions between all men. What significance and limits the hierarchical system of collective administration will have in this higher form of human social life is a matter for further study.

### III

To examine those unitary bodies whose internal relations are regulated by what is generally called the "democratic principle", for reasons of simplicity we will distinguish between organized collectivities whose hierarchies are imposed from outside and those that choose their own hierarchy from within. According to the religious conception and the pure doctrine of authority, in every epoch human society is a collective unit which receives its hierarchy from supernatural powers. We will not repeat the critique of such a metaphysical over-simplification which is contradicted by our whole experience. It is the necessity of the division of functions which gives rise naturally to hierarchies; and this is what has happened in the case of the family. As it develops into a tribe or horde, it must organize itself in order to struggle against rival tribes. Leadership must be entrusted to those most able to use the communal energies, and military hierarchies emerge in response to this need. This criterion of choice in the common interest appeared thousands of years before modern democratic electoralism; in the beginning kings, military chiefs and priests were elected. In the course of time, other criteria for the formation of hierarchies prevailed, giving rise to caste privileges transmitted by inheritance or even by initiation into closed schools, sects and cults. Nevertheless, in normal practice, accession to a given rank and inheritance of that rank were motivated by the possession of special aptitudes. We do not intend to follow here the whole process of the formation of castes and then of classes within society. We will only say that their appearance no longer corresponds to the logical necessity of a division of functions alone, but also to the fact that certain strata occupying a privileged position in the economic mechanism end up monopolizing power and social influence. In one way or another, every ruling caste provides itself with its own organization, its own hierarchy, and likewise, economically privileged classes. To limit ourselves to one example - the landed aristocracy of the Middle Ages, by uniting itself for the defence of its common privileges against the assaults of the other classes, constructed an organizational form culminating in the monarchy, which concentrated public powers in its own hands to the complete exclusion of the other layers of the population. The state of the feudal

epoch was the organization of the feudal nobility supported by the clergy. The principal element of coercion of the military monarchy was the army. Here we have a type of organized collectivity whose hierarchy was instituted from without since it was the king who bestowed the ranks, and in the army, passive obedience was the rule. Every form of state concentrates under one authority the organizing and officering of a whole series of executive hierarchies: the army, police, magistracy, bureaucracy. Thus the state makes material use of the activity of individuals from all classes, but it is organized on the basis of a single or a few privileged classes which appropriate the power to constitute its different hierarchies. The other classes, and in general all groups of individuals for whom it was only too evident that the state, in spite of its claims, by no means guaranteed the interests of everyone, seek to provide themselves with their own organizations in order to make their own interests prevail. Their point of departure is that their members occupy an identical position in production and economic life.

As for organizations which provide themselves with their own hierarchy, if we ask what is the best way to ensure the defence of the collective interests and to avoid the formation of privileged strata, some will propose the democratic method whose principle lies in using the majority opinion to select those to fill the various offices.

Our critique of such a method must be much more severe when it is applied to the whole of society as it is today, or to given nations, than when it is introduced into much more restricted organizations, such as trade unions and parties.

In the first case it must be rejected without hesitation as without foundation, since it takes no account of the situation of individuals in the economy and since it presupposes the intrinsic perfection of the system without taking into consideration the historical evolution of the collectivity to which it is applied.

The division of society into classes distinguished by economic privilege clearly removes all value from majority decision-making. Our critique refutes the deceitful theory that the democratic and parliamentary state machine which arose from modern liberal constitutions is an organization of all citizens in the interests of all citizens. From the moment that opposing interests and class conflicts exist, there can be no unity of organization, and in spite of the outward appearance of popular sovereignty, the state remains the organ of the economically dominant class and the instrument of defence of its interests. In spite of the application of the democratic system to political representation, bourgeois society appears as a complex network of unitary bodies. Many of these, which spring from the privileged layers and tend to preserve the present social apparatus, gather around the powerful centralized organism of the political state. Others may be neutral or may have a changing attitude towards the state. Finally, others arise within the economically oppressed and exploited layers and are directed against the class state. Communism demonstrates that the formal juridical and political application of the democratic and majority principle to all citizens while society is divided into opposed classes in



relation to the economy, is incapable of making the state an organizational unit of the whole society or the whole nation. Officially that is what political democracy claims to be, whereas in reality it is the form suited to the power of the capitalist class, to the dictatorship of this particular class, for the purpose of preserving its privileges.

Therefore it is not necessary to devote much time to refuting the error of attributing the same degree of independence and maturity to the vote of each elector, whether he is a worker exhausted by excessive physical labour or a rich dissolute, a shrewd captain of industry or an unfortunate proletarian ignorant of the causes of his misery and the means of remedying them. From time to time, after long intervals, the opinion of these and others is solicited, and it is claimed that the accomplishment of this "sovereign" duty is sufficient to ensure calm and the obedience of whoever feels victimized and ill-treated by the state policies and administration.

## IV

It is clear that the principle of democracy has no intrinsic virtue. It is not a "*principle*", but rather a simple *mechanism* of organization, responding to the simple and crude arithmetical presumption that the majority is right and the minority is wrong. Now we shall see if and to what extent this mechanism is useful and sufficient for the functioning of organizations comprising more restricted collectivities which are not divided by economic antagonisms. To do this, these organizations must be considered in their process of historical development.

Is this democratic mechanism applicable in the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. in the state form born from the revolutionary victory of rebel classes against the power of the bourgeois states? Can this form of state, on account of its internal mechanism of the delegation of powers and of the formation of hierarchies, thus be defined as a "proletarian democracy"? The question should be broached without prejudice, because if although we might reach the conclusion that the democratic mechanism is useful under certain conditions, as long as history has not produced a better mechanism, we must be convinced that there is not the slightest reason to establish *a priori* the concept of the sovereignty of the "majority" of the proletariat. In fact the day after the revolution, the proletariat will not yet be a totally homogeneous collectivity nor will it be the only class. In Russia for example, power is in the hands of the working class and the peasantry, but if we consider the entire development of the revolutionary movement, it is easy to demonstrate that the industrial proletarian class, although much less numerous than the peasantry, nevertheless plays a far more important role. Then it is logical that the Soviet mechanism accords much more value to the vote of a worker than that of a peasant.

We do not intend to examine thoroughly here the characteristics of the proletarian state constitution. We will not consider it metaphysically as something absolute, as reactionaries do the divine right of the monarchy, liberals, parliamentarism based on universal suffrage, and

anarchists, the non-state. As it is an organization of one class destined to strip the opposing classes of their economic privileges, the proletarian state is a real historical force which adapts itself to the goal it pursues, that is, to the necessities which gave birth to it. At certain moments its impulse may come from either broad mass consultations or from the action of very restricted executive organs endowed with full powers. What is essential is to give this organization of proletarian power the means and weapons to destroy bourgeois economic privilege and the political and military resistance of the bourgeoisie, in a way that prepares for the subsequent disappearance of classes themselves, and for the more and more profound modifications of the tasks and structure of the proletarian state.

One thing is sure - while bourgeois democracy's real goal is to deprive the large proletarian and petty-bourgeois masses of all influence in the control of the state, reserved for the big industrial, banking and agricultural oligarchies, the proletarian dictatorship must be able to involve the broadest layers of the proletarian and even semi-proletarian masses in the struggle that it embodies. But only those who are the victims of democratic prejudice could imagine that attaining this end merely requires the setting up of a vast mechanism of electoral consultation. This may be excessive or - more often - insufficient, because this form of participation by many proletarians may

result in their not taking part in other more active manifestations of the class struggle. On the other hand, the intensity of the struggle in particular phases demands speed of decision and movement and a centralized organization of efforts in a common direction, which, as the Russian experience is demonstrating with a whole series of examples, imposes on the proletarian state constitutional characteristics which are in open contradiction to the canons of bourgeois democracy. Supporters of bourgeois democracy howl about the violation of liberties, whereas it is only a matter of unmasking the philistine prejudices which have always allowed demagogues to ensure power to the privileged. In the dictatorship of the proletariat, the constitutional mechanism of the state organization is not only consultative, but at the same time executive. Participation in the functions of political life, if not of the whole mass of electors, then at least of a wide layer of their delegates, is not intermittent but continuous. It is interesting to note that this is accomplished without at all harming the unitary character of the action of the whole state apparatus - rather to the contrary. And this is thanks precisely to the criteria opposed to those of bourgeois hyperliberalism, that is, virtual suppression of *direct* elections and *proportional* representation, once, as we have seen, the other sacred dogma of the *equal* vote, has been overthrown.

We do not claim that these new criteria introduced into the representative mechanism, or codified in a constitution, stem from reasons of principle. Under new circumstances, the criteria could be different. In any case we are attempting to make it clear that we do not attribute any intrinsic value to these forms of organization and representation. This is translated into a fundamental Marxist thesis: the revolution is not a problem of forms of organization. On the

contrary, the revolution is a problem of content, a problem of the movement and action of revolutionary forces in an unending process, which cannot be theorized and crystallized in any scheme for an immutable "constitutional doctrine".

In any case, in the mechanisms of the workers' councils we find no trace of the rule of bourgeois democracy, which states that each citizen directly chooses his delegate to the supreme representative body, the parliament. On the contrary, there are different levels of workers' and peasants' councils, each one with a broader territorial base culminating in the congress of Soviets. Each local or district council elects its delegates to a higher council, and in the same way elects its own administration, i.e. its executive organ. At the base, in the city or rural council, the entire mass is consulted. In the election of delegates to higher councils and local administrative offices, each group of electors votes not according to a proportional system, but according to a majority system, choosing its delegates from lists put forward by the parties. Furthermore, since a single delegate is sufficient to establish a link between a lower and higher council, it is clear that the two dogmas of formal liberalism - voting for several members from a list and proportional representation - fall by the wayside. At each level, the councils must give rise to organs that are both consultative and administrative and directly linked to the central administration. Thus it is natural that as one progresses towards higher representative organs, one does not encounter parliamentary assemblies of chatterboxes who discuss interminably without ever acting; rather, one sees compact and homogeneous bodies capable of directing the action and political struggle, and of giving revolutionary guidance to the whole mass thus organized in a unitary fashion.

These capacities, which are definitely not automatically inherent in any constitutional schema, are reached in this mechanism because of the presence of an extremely important factor, the political party, whose content goes far beyond pure organizational form, and whose collective and active consciousness and will allow the work to be oriented according to the requirements of a long and always advancing process. Of all the organs of the proletarian dictatorship, the political party is the one whose characteristics most nearly approach those of a homogeneous unitary collectivity, unified in action. In reality, it only encompasses a minority of the mass, but the properties which distinguish it from all other broad-based forms of representative organization demonstrate precisely that the party represents the collective interests and movement better than any other organ. All party members participate directly in accomplishing the common task and prepare themselves to resolve the problems of the revolutionary struggle and the reconstruction of society, which the majority of the mass only become aware of when they are actually faced with them. For all these reasons, in a system of representation and delegation based not on the democratic lie but on a layer of the population whose common fundamental interests propel them on the course of revolution, it is natural that the choices fall spontaneously on elements put forward by the revolutionary party, which is equipped to respond to the demands of the struggle and to resolve the problems for which it has

been able to prepare itself. We do not attribute these capacities of the party to its particular constitution, anymore than we do in the case of any other organization. The party may or may not be suited to its task of leading the revolutionary action of a class; it is not any political party but a precise one, namely the communist party, that can assume this task, and not even the communist party is immune to the numerous dangers of degeneration and dissolution. What makes the party equal to its task is not its statutes or mere internal organizational measures. It is the positive characteristics which develop within the party because it participates in the struggle as an organization possessing a single orientation which derives from its conception of the historical process, form a fundamental programme which has been translated into a collective consciousness and at the same time from a secure organizational discipline.

To return to the nature of the constitutional mechanism of the proletarian dictatorship - of which we have already said that it was executive as well as legislative at all levels - we must add something to specify what tasks of the collective life this mechanism's executive functions and initiatives respond to. These functions and initiatives are the very reason for its formation, and they determine the relationships existing within its continually evolving elastic mechanism. We refer here to the initial period of proletarian power whose image we have in the four and a half years that the proletarian dictatorship has existed in Russia, because we do not wish to speculate as to what the definitive basis of the representative organs will be in a classless communist society. We cannot predict how exactly society will evolve as it approaches this stage; we can only envisage that it will move in the direction of a fusion of various political, administrative and economic organs, and at the same time, a progressive elimination of every element of coercion and of the state itself as an instrument of power of one class and a weapon of struggle against the surviving enemy classes.

In its initial period, the proletarian dictatorship has an extremely difficult and complex task that can be subdivided into three spheres of action: political, military and economic. Military defence against counter-revolutionary attacks from within and without and the reconstruction of society on a collective basis depend upon a systematic and rational plan of activity which, while utilizing the diverse energies of the whole mass with the maximum efficiency and results, must also achieve a powerful unity. As a consequence, the body which leads the struggle against the domestic and foreign enemy, that is, the revolutionary army and police, must be based on discipline, and its hierarchy must be centralized in the hands of the proletarian power. The Red Army itself is thus an organized unit whose hierarchy is imposed from without by the government of the proletarian state, and the same is true for the revolutionary police and tribunals.

The problems of the economic apparatus which the victorious proletariat erects in order to lay the foundations of the new system of production and distribution is more complex. The characteristic that distinguishes this rational administration from the "chaos" of bourgeois private economy is centralization. Every enterprise must be managed in the interest of the entire

collectivity and in harmony with the requirements of the whole plan of production and distribution. On the other hand, the economic apparatus (and the groups of individuals that comprise it) is continually being modified, not only through its own gradual development but also by the inevitable crises in a period of such vast transformations, which cannot be without political and military struggles. These considerations lead to the following conclusions: in the initial period of the proletarian dictatorship, although the councils at different levels must appoint their delegates to the local executive organs as well as to the legislative organs at higher levels, the absolute responsibility for military defence, and in a less rigid way, for the economic campaign, must remain with the centre. For their part, the local organs serve to organize the masses politically so that they will participate in fulfilling the plans and accept military and economic organization. They thereby create the conditions for the broadest and most continuous mass activity possible, and can channel this activity towards the formation of a highly centralized proletarian state.

These considerations certainly are not intended to deny all possibility of movement and initiative to the intermediary organs of the state hierarchy. But we wanted to show that one cannot theorize that they must be formed by the application of groups of electors organized on the basis of factories or army divisions to the revolution's executive tasks of maintaining military or economic order. The structure of such groups is simply not able to confer any special abilities on them. The units in which the electors are grouped at the base can therefore be formed according to empirical criteria. In fact they *will* constitute themselves according to empirical criteria, among which, for instance, the convergence in the workplace, the neighbourhood, the garrison, the battlefield or any other situation in daily life, without any of them being excluded *a priori* or held up as a model. This does not prevent the representative organs of the proletarian state from being based on a territorial division into electoral districts. None of these considerations is absolute, and this takes us back to our thesis that no constitutional schema has the value of a principle, and that majority democracy in the formal and arithmetic sense is only one possible method for coordinating the relations that arise within collective organizations. No matter what point of view one takes, it is impossible to attribute to it an intrinsic character of necessity or justice. For Marxists these terms have no meaning. Therefore we do not propose to substitute for the democratic schema which we have been criticizing any other schema of a state apparatus which in itself will be exempt from defects and errors.

## V

It seems to us that enough has been said about the democratic principle in its application to the bourgeois state, which claims to embrace all classes, and also in its application to the proletarian class exclusively as the basis of the state after the revolutionary victory. Something

should be said about the application of the democratic mechanism to organizations existing within the proletariat before (and also after) the conquest of power, i.e. in trade unions and the political party.

We established above that a true organizational unity is only possible on the basis of an identity of interests among the members. Since one joins unions or parties by virtue of a spontaneous decision to participate in a specific kind of action, a critique which absolutely denies any value to the democratic mechanism in the case of the bourgeois state (i.e. a fallacious constitutional union of all classes) is not applicable here. Nevertheless, even in the case of the party and the trade union it is necessary not to be led astray by the arbitrary concept of the "sanctity" of majority decisions.

In contrast to the party, the trade union is characterized by the virtual identity of its members' immediate material interests. Within the limits of the category, it attains a broad homogeneity of composition and it is an organization with voluntary membership. It tends to become an organization which all the workers of a given category or industry join automatically or are even, as in a certain phase of the dictatorship of the proletariat, obliged to join. It is certain that in this domain number remains the decisive factor and the majority decision has a great value, but we cannot confine ourselves to a schematic consideration of its results. It is also necessary to take into account other factors which come into play in the life of the union organization: a bureaucratized hierarchy of functionaries which paralyses the union under its tutelage, and the vanguard groups that the revolutionary party has established within it in order to lead it onto the terrain of revolutionary action. In this struggle, communists often point out that the functionaries of the union bureaucracy violate the democratic idea and are contemptuous of the will of the majority. It is correct to denounce this because the right-wing union bosses parade a democratic mentality, and it is necessary to point out their contradictions. We do the same with bourgeois liberals each time they coerce and falsify the popular consultation, without proposing that even a free consultation would resolve the problems which weigh on the proletariat. It is right and opportune to do this because in the moments when the broad masses are forced into action by the pressure of the economic situation, it is possible to turn aside the union bureaucrats' influence, which is in substance an extra-proletarian influence of classes and organizations alien to the trade union, thereby augmenting the influence of the revolutionary groups. But in all this there are no "constitutional" prejudices, and communists, provided that they are understood by the masses and can demonstrate to them that they are acting in the direction of their most immediate felt interests, can and must behave in a flexible way vis-à-vis the canons of formal democracy. For example, there is no contradiction between these two tactical attitudes: on one hand, taking the responsibility of representing the minority in the leadership organs of the unions insofar as the statutes allow; and on the other hand, stating that this statutory representation should be suppressed once we have conquered these organizations in order to speed up their actions. What should guide us in this question is a careful analysis of the

developmental process in the unions in the present phase. We must accelerate their transformation from organs of counter-revolutionary influence on the proletariat into organs of revolutionary struggle. The criteria of internal organization have no value in themselves but only insofar as they contribute to this objective.

We now analyze the party organization which we have already touched on in regard to the mechanism of the worker's state. The party does not start from as complete an identity of economic interests as does the union. On the contrary it bases the unity of its organization not on category, like the union, but on the much broader basis of the entire class. This is true not only in space, since the party strives to become international, but also in time, since it is the specific organ whose consciousness and action reflect the requirements of victory throughout the process of the proletariat's revolutionary emancipation. When we study the problems of party structure and internal organization, these well-known considerations force us to keep in mind the whole process of its formation and life in relation to the complex tasks which it continually has to carry out. At the end of this already long exposition, we cannot enter into details of the mechanism which should regulate consultation of the party's mass membership, their recruitment and the designation of responsible officers. There is no doubt that for the moment there is nothing better to do than hold to the majority principle. But as we have emphasized, there is no reason to raise use of the democratic mechanism to a principle. Besides its consultative functions, analogous to the legislative tasks of the state apparatus, the party has executive tasks which at the crucial moment of the struggle, correspond to those of an army and which demand maximum discipline toward the hierarchy. In fact, in the complex process which has led to the formation of communist parties, the emergence of a hierarchy is a real and dialectical phenomenon which has remote origins and which corresponds to the entire past experience of the functioning of the party's mechanism. We cannot state that the decisions of the party majority are *per se* as correct as those of the infallible supernatural judges who are supposed to have given human societies their leaders, like the gods believed in by all those who think that the Holy Spirit participates in papal conclaves. Even in an organization like the party where the broad composition is a result of selection through spontaneous voluntary membership and control of recruitment, the decision of the majority is not intrinsically the best. If it contributes to a better working of the party's executive bodies, this is only because of the coincidence of individual efforts in a unitary and well-oriented work. We will not propose at this time replacing this mechanism by another and we will not examine in detail what such a new system might be. But we can envisage a mode of organization which will be increasingly liberated from the conventions of the democratic principle, and it will not be necessary to reject it out of unjustified fears if one day it can be shown that other methods of decision, of choice, of resolution of problems are more consistent with the real demands of the party's development and its activity in the framework of history.

The democratic criterion has been for us so far a material and incidental factor in the construction of our internal organization and the formulation of our party statutes; it is not an

indispensable platform for them. Therefore we will not raise the organizational formula known as "democratic centralism" to the level of a principle. Democracy cannot be a principle for us. Centralism is indisputably one, since the essential characteristics of party organization must be unity of structure and action. The term *centralism* is sufficient to express the continuity of party structure in space; in order to introduce the essential idea of continuity in time, the historical continuity of the struggle which, surmounting successive obstacles, always advances towards the same goal, and in order to combine these two essential ideas of unity in the same formula, we would propose that the communist party base its organization on "organic centralism". While preserving as much of the incidental democratic mechanism that can be used, we will eliminate the use of the term "democracy", which is dear to the worst demagogues but tainted with irony for the exploited, oppressed and cheated, abandoning it to the exclusive usage of the bourgeoisie and the champions of liberalism in their diverse guises and sometimes extremist poses.

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Amadeo Bordiga 1926

# Draft theses for the 3rd Congress of the Communist Party of Italy presented by the Left

(The Lyons Theses, 1926)

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## I. — General questions

### 1. — Principles of communism

The key doctrines of the communist party are founded on Marxism, which the struggle against opportunist deviations reinstated and set in place as the cornerstones of the 3rd International. These consist of: Dialectical Materialism as the method of conceiving of the world and human history; the fundamental doctrines contained in Marx's **Capital** as method of interpretation of present-day capitalist economy; the programmatic formulations of **The Communist Manifesto** as the historical and political plan of emancipation of the world working class. The magnificent victorious experience of the Russian revolution, and the work of its leader Lenin, master of international communism, constitute the confirmation, the restoration and the consequent development of this system of principles and methods. It is not possible to be a communist or to militate in the ranks of the International if even one part of this is rejected.

Consequently, the communist party rejects and condemns the doctrines of the dominant class, which range from spiritualistic and religious theories — idealist in philosophy and reactionary in politics — to those which are positivist and of a free-thinking Voltairian variety — and anti-clerical and democratic in the realm of politics.

It likewise condemns certain political schools which have a following amongst the working-class: social-democratic reformism, which cherishes peaceful transition, without armed struggle, from capitalist to workers' power, invoking class collaboration; syndicalism, which depreciates the political activity of the working class and the need for the party as supreme revolutionary organ; anarchism, which denies the historical necessity of the State and of the proletarian dictatorship as the means whereby the social order is transformed and class divisions suppressed. The communist party likewise opposes the many manifestations of spurious revolutionism which aim to resuscitate such tendencies by mingling them with communist theses — a danger that is designated by the now well-known term "centrism".

## 2. — Nature of the Party

The historical course of the proletariat's emancipation and the foundation of a new social order derives from the existence of the class struggle. Every class struggle is a political struggle; that is to say, it has the tendency to end up as a struggle for the conquest of political power and control of the new State organism. **Consequently, the organ which leads the class struggle to its final victory is the class political party, which is the sole possible instrument firstly of revolutionary insurrection and then of government.** From these simple but brilliant assertions of Marx, brought into maximum relief by Lenin, arises the definition of the party as an organisation of all those who are conscious of the system of opinions in which is summed up the historical task of the revolutionary class and who have decided to work for the victory of this class. Thanks to the party, the working class acquires the knowledge of the way forward and the will to take it. **Historically, the party therefore represents the class in the successive stages of the struggle, even if only a greater or smaller part of the class is regrouped in its ranks.**

This equates with how Lenin defined the party at the 2nd World Congress.

Marx and Lenin's conception of the party stands in sharp contrast to the typically opportunist conception of the labourist or workerist party to whom all those individuals who are proletarian in terms of their social condition are admitted by right. Within such a party, even if exhibiting an apparent numerical strength, there may, and indeed in certain conditions there will, prevail the direct counter-revolutionary influence of the dominant class; a class represented by the dictatorship of the organisers and leaders who as individuals can derive just as well from the proletariat as from other classes. This is why Marx and Lenin fought against this fatal theoretical error, and never hesitated to break up false proletarian unity in practice in order to ensure, even during moments when the social activity of the proletariat was eclipsed, and even by way of small political groups of adherents of the revolutionary programme, that there would be continuity of the political function of the party in preparation for the subsequent tasks of the proletariat. This is the only possible way to achieve in the future the concentration of the greatest possible section of workers around the leadership and under the banner of a communist party capable of fighting and winning.

An **immediate** organisation of all workers on an economic basis cannot take on political — that is revolutionary — tasks since the separate and localised professional groups feel impelled to satisfy only the partial demands that arise as a direct consequence of capitalist exploitation. Only with the direct intervention at the head of the working-class of a political party, defined by the **political** adherence of its members, do we find the progressive synthesis of these particular impulses into a common vision and activity, whereby individuals and groups are enabled to go beyond all particularism and accept difficulties and sacrifices for the final and general triumph of the working-class cause. The definition of the party as class party of the working class has a final and historical value for Marx and Lenin — not a vulgarly statistical and constitutional one.

Any conception of the problems of internal organisation that leads to the error of the labourist conception of the party reveals a serious theoretical deviation, inasmuch as it substitutes a democratic vision for a revolutionary one, and attributes more importance to utopian schemes for designing new organisations than to the dialectical reality of the collision of forces between the two opposed classes. In other words, it represents the danger of relapsing into opportunism. As regards the perils of degeneration of the revolutionary movement, and of the means to guarantee the required continuity of the political line in its leaders and members, these dangers can't be eradicated with organisational formulae. Less still is it possible to eliminate them with the formula which states that only authentic workers can be communist, a position contradicted in our own experience by the vast majority of examples, relating to both individuals and parties. The aforementioned guarantee must be sought elsewhere if we don't wish to contradict the fundamental marxist postulate; **"the revolution isn't a question of forms of organisation"**; a postulate in which are summed up all the conquests achieved by scientific socialism with respect to the first rantings of utopianism.

Our resolution to the current problems regarding the internal organisation of the International and the party set out from these conceptions on the nature of the class party.

### 3. — Party Tactics and Party Action

The way the party operates in response to specific situations, and relates to other groups, organisations, and institutions of the society in which it moves, constitute its' tactics. The general elements of this question must be defined in relation to our overall principles; it is then possible, on a secondary level, to establish concrete norms of action in relation to different types of practical problems and the successive phases of historical development.

By assigning to the revolutionary party its place and its role in the genesis of a new society, the marxist doctrine provides the most brilliant of resolutions to the question of freedom and determination in the activity of mankind. When extended to the abstract "individual" however, the question will continue to furnish material for the metaphysical lucubrations of the philosophers of the ruling and decadent class for years to come. Marxism on the other hand situates the problem in the correct light of a scientific and objective conception of society and history. The idea that the individual — and indeed one individual — can act on the outside world and shape it and mould it at will as though the power of initiative partook of some kind of divine inspiration is a million miles from our view. We equally condemn the voluntarist conception of the party according to which a small group of men, after having forged for themselves a profession of faith, proceed to spread and impose it by a gigantic effort of will, activity and heroism. It would, on the other hand, be a stupid and aberrant conception of marxism to believe that the course of history and revolution proceed according to fixed laws, with nothing remaining for us to do apart from discovering what these laws might be through objective research and attempting to formulate predictions about the future whilst attempting nothing in the domain of action; The upshot of this fatalist conception is to annul the function of the party and indeed its very existence. Marxist determinism doesn't attempt to find a solution halfway between these two solutions but in its powerful originality rises above them both. Because it is dialectical and historical, it rejects all apriorisms and doesn't claim to be able to apply, regardless of the historical epoch or the human groupings under consideration, one abstract solution to every problem. If the current development of the sciences does not allow for a complete investigation of what induces the individual to act, starting with physical and biological facts to arrive at a science of psychological activity, it is nevertheless possible to resolve the problem in the field of sociology by applying to the problem, like Marx, the methods of investigation appropriate to experimental and positive science fully inherited by socialism and which are quite different from the self-styled materialistic and positivist philosophy adopted during the historical advance of the bourgeois class. By taking rational account of the reciprocal influences between individuals, through the critical study of economy and history, after having

cleared the decks of every prejudice contained in the traditional ideologies, we can in a certain sense remove indeterminacy from the processes operating within each individual. With this as its point of departure, marxism has been able to establish an ideological system that isn't an immutable and fixed gospel, but a living instrument that enables the laws of the historical process to be followed and recognised. By means of the economic determinism discovered by Marx, which forms the basis of this system, the study of economic forms and relationships, and the development of the technical means of production, provides us with an objective platform on which to make soundly based enunciations about the laws of social life, and, to a certain degree, make predictions about its subsequent development. With this duly recorded, we must emphasise that the final solution doesn't mean we can say that having discovered the universal key, we may let economic phenomena follow their own immanent law and a predictable and established series of political facts will inevitably take place.

Undoubtedly our critique is tantamount as completely and definitely devoiding of any meaning the aims and perspectives individuals had in historical events, even when such individuals are considered protagonists of historical deeds, although this does not completely apply to their actions. This, however, does not imply that a collective organism, such as the class party, could not, and should not, express initiatives of its own or have its own will. The solution we get to is countless times expressed in our fundamental texts.

Humanity, and its most powerful groupings such as classes, parties and States, have moved almost as if they were playthings in the grip of economic laws, up to now almost entirely unknown to them. These groupings at the same time have lacked theoretical awareness of the economic process, and the possibility of managing and controlling it. However, the class that appears in the present historical epoch, the proletariat, and the political groupings, which inevitably emanate from it -the party and the State — for them the problem, is modified. This is because the proletariat is the first class that isn't driven to base its rise to power on the consolidation of social privileges and class divisions, the first not to subject and exploit another class anew, whilst at the same time, it is the first that manages to shape a doctrine of the social and historical development of the economy — in other words: Marxist Communism.

For the first time then, a class fights for the suppression of classes in general and the suppression of private property in the means of production in general, rather than fighting for the mere transformation of the social forms of property.

The proletariat's programme, together with its emancipation from the present dominant and privileged classes, is the emancipation of the human collectivity from bondage to the laws of economy, which once understood, can be dominated within an economy which is finally rational and scientific, and which is subject to the direct intervention of Man. This is what Engels meant when he wrote that the proletarian revolution marks the passage from the world of necessity to the world of freedom.

This does not mean that we resuscitate the illusory myth of individualism, which wishes to liberate the human “ego” from external influences, especially since these influences tend to become ever more complex and the life of the individual ever more an indistinguishable part of a collective life. On the contrary, the parameters of the problem are changed, with will and freedom attributed to a class, a class destined to become the unitary human grouping itself, a grouping which one day will struggle against the adverse forces of the external physical world alone.

Whilst only proletarian humanity (still in the future for us) will be free and capable of a will isn't sentimental illusion but the capacity to organise and master the economy in the broadest sense of the word; and whilst it is true that the proletarian class today still has the extent of its activity **determined** by influences external to it (though less so than other classes), the organ in which, on the contrary, is summed up the full extent of volitional possibilities and initiative in all fields of activity is the political party. Not just any old party though, but the party of the proletarian class, the communist party, linked as though by an unbroken thread to the ultimate goals in the future. The party's power of volition, as well as its consciousness and theoretical knowledge are functions that are exquisitely collective. Marxism explains that the leaders in the party itself are given their job because they are considered as instruments and operators who best manifest the capacity to comprehend and explain facts and lead and will action, with such capacities nevertheless maintaining their origin in the existence and character of the collective organ. By way of these considerations, the marxist conception of the party and its activity, as we have stated, thus shuns fatalism, which would have us as passive spectators of phenomena into which no direct intervention is felt possible.

Likewise, it rejects every voluntarist conception, as regards individuals, according to which the qualities of theoretical preparation, force of will, and the spirit of sacrifice — in short, a special type of moral figure and a requisite level of “purity” — set the required standards for every single party militant without exception, reducing the latter to an elite, distinct and superior to the rest of the elements that compose the working class. The fatalist and passivistic error, though it might not necessarily lead to negating the function and the utility of the party, at the very least would certainly involve adapting the party to a proletarian class that is understood merely in a statistical and economic sense. We can sum up the conclusions touched on in the preceding theses as the condemnation of both the workerist conception, and that of an elite of an intellectual and moral character. Both these tendencies are aberrations from marxism which end up converging on the slippery slope to opportunism.

In resolving the general question of tactics on the same terrain as that of the nature of party, the marxist solution must be distinguished both from that doctrinal estrangement from the reality of the class struggle which contents itself with abstract lucubrations, whilst negating concrete activity, and from sentimental aestheticism; which aspires, with the noisy gestures and heroic posturing of tiny minorities, to bring about new situations and historical movements.

Also, it must be distinguished from opportunism, which neglects the link with principles, i.e. with the general scope of the movement, and, keeping in view only an immediate and apparent success, is content to clamour for isolated and limited demands without bothering about whether these contradict the necessity of preparing for the supreme conquests of the working class. The mistake of Anarchist politics derives both from a doctrinal sterility, in its incapacity to comprehend the dialectical stages of real historical evolution, and from its voluntarist illusions, which cherish the fond hope of being able to speed up social processes by the force of example, and of sacrifices made by the one or the many. The mistake of social-democratic politics derives as much from a false conception of marxism in holding that the revolution will mature slowly of its own accord, without a revolutionary insurrection willed by the proletariat, as it does from a voluntarist pragmatism, which, unable to relinquish the immediate results of its day to day initiatives and interventions, is happy to struggle for objectives which are of only superficial interest to proletarian groups. For once obtained, these objectives merely become parts of the game of conserving the dominant class rather than serving as preparation for the victory of the proletariat: such objectives are the partial reforms, concessions and advantages, both political and economic, obtained from the bosses and the bourgeois State.

The artificial introduction into the class movement of the theoretical dictates of “modern” voluntarist and pragmatist philosophy (Bergson, Gentile, Croce) based on idealism, can only but prepare the opportunist affirmation of new waves of reformism. It cannot be passed off as reaction to reformism just because it demonstrate a superficial liking for bourgeois positivism.

The party cannot and must not restrict its activity either to merely conserving the purity of theoretical principles and organisational structure, or to achieving immediate successes and a numerical popularity regardless of the cost. At all times and in all places, it must consolidate the following three points:

- a) The defence and clarification of the fundamental programmatic postulates, that is, the theoretical knowledge of the working-class movement, in relation to new events as they arise;
- b) The assurance of the continuity of the organisational unity and efficiency of the party, and its defence against contamination by extraneous influences opposed to the revolutionary interests of the proletariat;
- c) The active participation in all the struggles of the working class, including those that arise out of partial and limited interests, in order to encourage their development. Emphasis however must constantly be placed on the factor of their links with the final revolutionary aims, and with the conquests of the class struggle presented as stepping-stones on the way to the indispensable combat to come. This means denouncing the perils of abandoning ourselves to partial accomplishments as though they were points of arrival, and the danger of bartering these for the conditions of class activity and combativity of the proletariat which are the autonomy and

independence of its ideology and its organisations, most important of which is the party.

The supreme purpose of this complex party activity is the creation of the **subjective** conditions for the proletariat's preparation, so that it is in a position to profit from revolutionary possibilities as soon as history presents them, and emerge from the struggle victor rather than vanquished.

All this is the point of departure for responding to the questions of the relations between the party and the proletarian masses, the party and other political parties, and the proletariat and other social classes. We must consider the following tactical formulation wrong: all true communist parties should **in all situations** strive to be mass parties, that is to say, always be organisations with huge memberships and a very widespread influence over the proletariat such as to at least exceed that of the other self-styled workers' parties. Such a proposal is a caricature of Lenin's practical, relevant and eminently appropriate watchword of 1921, namely: in order to conquer power, it isn't sufficient to form "genuine" communist parties and launch them into the insurrectionary offensive because what is needed are numerically powerful parties with a predominating influence over the proletariat. In other words, before the conquest of power, and in the period leading up to it, the party must have the masses with it; must first of all conquer the masses. Such a formulation only becomes rather dangerous when used in conjunction with the notion of the **majority** of the masses, since it lends itself amongst "chapter and verse" leninists, now as in the past, to the danger of a social-democratic interpretation of theory and tactics; for although expressing the perfectly correct idea that the dangerous practice of engaging in **reckless** actions with insufficient forces, or when the moment isn't ripe, must be avoided, the unspecificness about how the majority is to be measured i.e. whether in the parties, the unions or other organs, gives rise to the opposite danger of being diverted from action when it is both possible and appropriate; that is, at times when truly "leninist" resolution and initiative is required.

The formula which states that the party must have the masses with it on the eve of the struggle has now become a typically opportunist formula in the facile interpretation of today's pseudo-leninists when they assert that the party must in "all situations" be a mass party. There are objective situations when the balance of forces are unfavourable to revolution (although perhaps closer to the revolution in time than others — marxism teaches us that historical evolution takes place at very different rates), in these situations, the wish to be the majority party of the masses and enjoy an overriding political influence at all costs, can only at such times be achieved by renouncing communist principles and methods and engaging in social-democratic and petty-bourgeois politics instead. It must be emphatically stated that in certain situations, past, present and future, the proletariat has, does, and inevitably will adopt a non-revolutionary stance — either a position of inertia, or collaboration with the enemy as the case may be — but despite everything, the proletariat everywhere and always remains the potentially revolutionary class entrusted with the revolutionary counter-attack; but this is only



insofar as within it there exists the communist party and where, without ever renouncing coherent interventions when appropriate, this party avoids taking paths, which although apparently the easiest routes to instant popularity, would divert it from its task and thereby remove the essential point of support for ensuring the proletariat's recovery. On dialectical and marxist grounds such as these (and never on aesthetic and sentimental grounds) we reject the bestial expression of opportunism that maintains that a communist party is free to adopt all means and all methods. By some it is said that precisely because the party is truly communist, sound in principles and organisation, it can indulge in the most acrobatic of political manoeuvrings, but what this assertion forgets is that the party itself is both factor and product of historical development, and the even more malleable proletariat is yet more so. The proletariat will not be influenced by the contorted justifications for such "manoeuvres" offered by party leaders but by actual results, and the party must know how to anticipate these results mainly by using the experience of past mistakes. It is not just by theoretical credos and organisational sanctions that the party will be guaranteed against degeneration, but by acting correctly in the field of tactics, and by making a determined effort to block off false paths with precise and respected norms of action.

Within the tactical sphere there is another error which clearly leads back to the classical opportunist positions dismantled by Marx and Lenin. This consists in asserting that in the case of struggles between classes and political organisations which take place outside the party's specific terrain, the party must choose the side which represents the development of the situation most favourable to general historical evolution, and should more or less openly support and coalesce with it. The pretext for this is that the conditions for a complete proletarian revolution (to be set in motion by the party when the time comes) will have arrived solely when there has been a sufficient maturation and evolution of political and social forms.

For a start, the very presuppositions that lie behind such politics are at fault: the typical scheme of a social and political evolution, fixed down to the smallest detail, as allegedly providing the best preparation for the final advent of communism belongs to the opportunist brand of "marxism", and is the basis on which the various Kautskys set about defaming the Russian Revolution and the present Communist movement. It isn't even possible to establish in a general way that the most propitious conditions for communist party work to bear fruit are to be found under certain types of bourgeois regime, e.g. the most democratic. For whilst it is true that the reactionary and "right-wing" measures of bourgeois governments have often obstructed the proletariat, it is no less true, and in fact occurs far more often, that the liberal and left-wing politics of bourgeois governments have also stifled the class struggle and diverted the working-class from taking decisive action. A more accurate evaluation, truly conforming with Marxism's breaking of the democratic, evolutionist and progressive spell, maintains that the bourgeoisie attempts, and often succeeds, in alternating its methods and parties in government according to its counter-revolutionary interests. All our experience shows us that whenever the

proletariat gets enthusiastic about the vicissitudes of bourgeois politics, opportunism triumphs.

Secondly, even if it were true that certain changes of government within the present regime made the further development of proletarian action easier, there is clear evidence that this would depend on one express condition: the existence of a party which had issued timely warnings to the masses about the disappointment which would inevitably follow what had appeared to be an immediate success; indeed not just the existence of the party, but its capacity to take action, even before the struggle to which we refer, in a manner which is clearly perceived as autonomous by proletarians, who follow the party not on the basis of schemes which it might be convenient to adopt at an official level but because of the party's down-to-earth attitude. When faced with struggles unable to culminate in the definitive proletarian victory, the party doesn't turn itself into a manager of transitional demands and accomplishments which are not of direct interest to the class it represents, and neither does it barter away its specific character and autonomous activity in order to become a kind of insurance society for all the political "renewal" movements or political systems and governments under threat from an allegedly "worse government".

The requirements of this line of action are often falsified by invoking both Marx's formulation that "communists support any movement directed against existing social conditions", and the whole of Lenin's doctrine directed against "the infantile disorder of Communism". The speculations attempted on these declarations of Marx and Lenin within our movement are substantially similar to analogous speculations continually indulged in by the revisionists and centrists of the Bernstein and Nenni stamp, who in the name of Marx and Lenin have mocked revolutionary marxism.

We must make two observations; first of all, Marx's and Lenin's positions have a contingent historical value since they refer in Marx's case to a pre-bourgeois Germany, and in Lenin's case, as illustrated in Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder, to the Bolshevik experience in Tsarist Russia. We shouldn't base our resolution of tactical questions under classical conditions, i.e. the proletariat in conflict with a fully developed capitalist bourgeoisie, on these foundations alone. Secondly, the support to which Marx refers, and Lenin's "compromises" (Lenin as a great marxist dialectician and champion of real, non-formal intransigence, aimed and directed at an immutable goal, liked to "flirt" with such terms) are support and compromises with movements still forced to clear the way forward with their insurrection against past social formations, even if this does contradict their ideology and the long-term aims of their leaders.

The intervention of the Communist party therefore occurs as an intervention in the setting of a civil war, and this explains Lenin's positions on the peasant and the national question, during the Kornilov affair and in a hundred other cases. These two key observations aside, neither Lenin's criticism of infantilism, nor any marxist text on the suppleness of revolutionary politics, was ever meant to undermine the barrier deliberately erected against opportunism; defined by Engels, and later by Lenin, as "absence of principles", or obliviousness of the final goal.

Constructing Communist tactics with a formalist rather than a dialectical method is a repudiation of Marx and Lenin. It is, therefore, a major error to assert that means should correspond to the ends not by way of their historical and dialectical succession in the process of development, but depending on similarities and analogous aspects that means and ends may assume in a certain immediate sense, and which we might call ethical, psychological and aesthetic. We don't need to make in the field of tactics the mistake made in the realm of principle by anarchists and reformists; to whom it seems absurd both that suppression of classes and State power is prepared by way of the predominance of the proletarian class and its dictatorship, and that abolition of all social violence is realised by employing both offensive and defensive revolutionary violence; revolutionary towards the existing power and conservative towards the proletarian power.

And it would be just as mistaken to make the following assertions: that a revolutionary party must support every struggle without taking into account the strengths of friends and foes; that communists must inevitably champion a strike to the bitter end; and that communists must shun certain means of dissimulation, trickery, espionage etc, because they aren't particularly noble or pleasant. Marxism and Lenin's critique of the superficial pseudo-revolutionism that fouls the path of the proletariat consists of attempts to eliminate these stupid and sentimental criteria as ways of resolving the problem of tactics, and their critique is now a definitively acquired experience of the communist movement.

One tactical error that this critique allows us to avoid is the following: that since communists aim for a political split with the opportunists, we should therefore support splitting off from trade unions led by supporters of the yellow Amsterdam union. It is merely polemical trickery that has misrepresented the Italian left as basing its conclusions on notions like "it is undignified to meet the opportunist leaders in person", and so on.

The critique of "infantilism" doesn't however mean that indeterminacy, chaos and arbitrariness must govern tactics, or that "all means" are appropriate for achieving our aims. To say that harmony between the means employed, and the ultimate objective, is guaranteed by the revolutionary nature of the party, and by the contributions that eminent men or groups backed up by a brilliant tradition will bring to its decision-making is just a non-marxist playing with words, because it doesn't take into account the repercussions on the party which its actions will have in the dialectical play of cause and effect. It also ignores the fact that marxism ascribes no value whatsoever to the "intentions" that dictate the initiatives of individuals or groups; and the bloody experience of the past means we cannot avoid being "suspicious" about what lies behind these intentions, though we don't mean that in an insulting way.

In his pamphlet on the infantile disorder of communism, Lenin wrote that the tactical means must be chosen in advance in order to fulfil the final revolutionary objective and governed by a clear historical vision of the proletarian struggle and its final goal. He showed it would be

absurd to reject some tactical expedient just because it seemed “nasty” or was deserving of the definition “compromise” and that it was, on the contrary, necessary to decide whether or not each tactic fitted in with achieving this final goal. The collective activity of the party and the Communist International poses and will continue to pose this formidable task. In matters of theoretical principle we can say that Marx and Lenin have bequeathed us a sound heritage, although that isn’t to say that there aren’t any new tasks of theoretical research for communism to accomplish. In tactical matters, on the other hand, we can’t say the same, even after the Russian revolution and the experience of the first years of the life of the new International which was deprived of Lenin all too soon. The question of tactics is much too complex to be resolved by the simplistic and sentimental answers of communist “infantiles”, and it requires in-depth contributions from the whole of the International communist movement in the light of its experience, old and new. Marx and Lenin aren’t being contradicted if we state that in order to resolve this question, rules of conduct must be followed which, whilst not as vital and fundamental as principles, are nevertheless binding both on party members and the leading organs of the movement, who should forecast the different ways in which situations may develop so as to plan with the greatest possible degree of accuracy how the party should act when one of these hypothetical scenarios assumes specific dimensions.

Comprehending and weighing up the situation has to be the key requirement for making tactical decisions because this allows us to signal to the movement that the time has come for an action which has already been anticipated as far as possible; it doesn’t however allow arbitrary “improvisations” and “surprises” on the part of the leaders. We can’t predict with absolute certainty how objective situations will turn out, but we can predict what we should do in certain hypothetical situations, that is to say, we can predict tactics in their broad outlines. To deny this possibility and necessity would be to deny both a fundamental party duty, and to reject the only assurance we can give that in all circumstances party militants and the masses will agree to take orders from the leading centre. In this sense the party is not like an army or any other State mechanism, for in these organs hierarchical authority prevails and voluntary adhesion counts for nothing. We perhaps state the obvious when we say that there will always be a way left open, incurring no penalties, for party members not to obey orders i.e., simply leaving the party. Good tactics are as follows: in a given situation, even when the leading centre doesn’t have time to consult the party — still less the masses — the tactics are such that they don’t lead to unexpected repercussions inside the party itself and within the proletariat, and they don’t go in a sense opposed to the success of the revolutionary campaign. The art of predicting how the party will react to orders, and which orders will be well received, is the art of revolutionary tactics. These tactics can only be relied upon if they collectively utilise the experiences of the past summed up in clear rules of action and if the membership, having entrusted the fulfilment of this latter task to the leaders, is convinced that these will not betray their mandate and are genuinely and decisively, and not just apparently, engaged in the work of carrying out the movement’s orders. We have no hesitation in saying that since the party itself is something perfectible but

not perfect, much has to be sacrificed for clarity's sake to the persuasive capacity of the tactical norms, even if this does entail a certain schematisation: for even when tactical schemes prepared by us collapse under the weight of circumstances, the matter is never remedied by relapsing into opportunism and eclecticism but rather by renewed efforts to bring tactics back into line with the duties of the party. It isn't only the good party that makes good tactics, but good tactics that makes the good party and good tactics have to be amongst those that everybody has chosen, and everybody has understood in their main outlines.

Basically, what we are rejecting is that the difficult work of the party in collectively defining its tactical norms should be stifled by demands for unconditional obedience to one man, one committee, or one particular party of the International, and its traditional apparatus of leadership.

The activity of the party takes on **strategic** aspects in the culminating moments of the struggle for power, at which point it assumes an essentially military character. Even in the preceding phase, the party's activity is not restricted merely to ideological, propagandist and organisational functions but consists, as we've already mentioned, of active participation in the various proletarian struggles. This being so, the system of tactical norms must therefore be constructed with the precise aim of establishing under what conditions the intervention and the activity of the party in such movements — its **agitation** in the life of proletarian struggles — harmonises with the final revolutionary objective whilst simultaneously guaranteeing useful progress in the spheres of ideological, organisational and tactical preparation.

In the next part, we will take particular problems and examine how our elaboration of the particular norms of communist activity relates to the present stage of development of the revolutionary movement.

## II. — International questions

### 1. — The constitution of the Third International

The crisis in the 2nd International caused by the war was resolved, completely and definitively, by the constitution of the Communist International, but whilst the formation of the Comintern certainly constituted an immense historical conquest from the organisational and tactical point of view, and from the point of view of the restoration of revolutionary doctrine, it did not however completely resolve the crisis in the proletarian movement.

The Russian Revolution, the first glorious victory of the world proletariat, was a fundamental factor in the formation of the new International. However, owing to the social conditions in Russia, the Russian revolution didn't provide the general historical model for revolutions in

other countries in a tactical sense. This is because in the passage from feudal autocratic power to the proletarian dictatorship, there had been no epoch of political dominion by the bourgeois class, organised in its own exclusive and stable State apparatus.

It is precisely for this reason that the historical confirmation of the conceptions of the Marxist programme in the Russian revolution has been of such enormous significance and of such great use in routing social democratic revisionism in the realm of principles. In the organisational field however, the struggle against the 2nd International — an integral part of the struggle against global capitalism — hasn't met with the same success, and a lot of errors have been committed which have resulted in the Communist parties not being as effective as objective conditions would have allowed.

We are obliged to say the same when it comes to tactical matters, since many of the problems linked to the present line up of forces: the bourgeoisie, modern parliamentary bourgeois State with a historically stable apparatus, and the proletariat, have not been resolved adequately and this continues to be the case today. The communist parties haven't always obtained all they could have done from the proletarian offensive against capitalism, and from the liquidation of the social democratic parties, i.e. the political organs of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie.

## **2. — World economic and political situation (1926)**

The international situation today appears less favourable to the proletariat than in the immediate post-war years. From the economic point of view, we witness a partial restabilisation of capitalism. However, we understand this stabilisation only to mean only that certain parts of the economic structure have been contained, and not that a state of affairs has arisen which excludes the possibility, even in the immediate future, of new disturbances.

There is still a marked capitalist crisis and its definitive worsening is inevitable. In the political sphere, we witness a weakening of the revolutionary movement in almost every advanced country, counter-balanced, happily, by the consolidation of soviet Russia and by the struggles of the colonial peoples against the capitalist powers.

Such a situation presents a double danger however. In the first place, by pursuing the erroneous method of situationism, a certain tendency towards Menshevism arises in the way the problems of proletarian action are evaluated. Secondly, if the pressure from genuine classist actions diminishes, the conditions which Lenin saw as necessary for a correct application of tactics in the national and peasant question risk being misapplied within the overall politics of the Comintern.

The post-war proletarian offensive was followed by an employers' offensive against proletarian positions, to which the Comintern replied with the watchword of the United Front.

There then arose the problem of the rise in various countries of democratic-pacifist situations, which comrade Trotsky correctly denounced as representing a danger of degeneration for our movement. We must avoid all interpretations of situations which present as a vital question for the proletariat the struggle between two parts of the bourgeoisie, the right and the left, and the too strict identification of these with socially distinct groups.

The correct interpretation is that the dominant class possesses several governmental methods that are in essence reduced to two: the reactionary fascist method, and the liberal democratic method.

Setting out from an analysis of economy, Lenin's theses have already reliably proved that the most modern strata of the bourgeoisie tend to unify not only the productive mechanism, but also their political defences into the most decisive forms.

It is therefore false to state that as a general rule the road to communism must pass through a stage of left-wing bourgeois government. If nevertheless such a case arose, the condition for proletarian victory would reside in a party tactic of marshalling against the illusions generated by the accession of such a left-wing government and continuous opposition, even during periods of reaction, to political democratic formations.

### **3. — The International's Method of Work**

One of the Communist International's most important tasks has been dispelling the proletariat's mistrust of political action, which arose as a result of the parliamentary degeneracies of opportunism.

Marxism doesn't interpret politics as the art of using cunning techniques in parliamentary and diplomatic intrigues, to be used by all parties in pursuit of their special ends. Proletarian politics rejects the bourgeois method of politics and anticipates higher forms of relations culminating in the art of revolutionary insurrection. This rejection, which we will not present in greater theoretical detail here, is the vital condition both for the effective linking up of the revolutionary proletariat with its communist leadership, and for ensuring effective selection of personnel for the latter.

The working methods of the International fly in the face of this revolutionary necessity. In the relations between the different organs of the communist movement a two-faced politics frequently gains the upper hand, and a subordination of theoretical rationale to fortuitous motives, and a system of treaties and pacts between persons which fails to faithfully convey the relations between the parties and the masses, has led to bitter disappointments.

Improvisation, surprises, and theatrical scene changes, are factors that are entering all too

easily into the major and fundamental decisions of the International, disorientating both comrades and the proletariat alike.

For example, the majority of internal party questions are resolved in international organs and congresses by a series of unwieldy arrangements which make them acceptable to the various leadership groups but add nothing useful to the real process of party growth.

#### **4. — Organisational Questions**

The consideration that it was urgent to establish a vast concentration of revolutionary forces carried a lot of weight when the Comintern was founded because at the time it was anticipated that there would be a far more rapid development of objective conditions. Nevertheless, we can now see that it would have been preferable to establish more rigorous organisational criteria. The formation of parties and the conquest of the masses has been favoured neither by concessions to anarchist and syndicalist groups, nor by the small compromises with the centrists allowed for by the 21 conditions; neither has it been favoured by organic fusions with parties or fractions of parties as a result of political “infiltration”, nor by tolerating a dual communist organisation in some countries with sympathiser parties. The watchword, launched after the 5th congress, of organising the party on the basis of factory cells, hasn’t achieved its objective, which was to remedy the glaring defects that exist in the various sections of the International.

Once applied as a general rule, especially in the way the Italian leadership has interpreted it, this watchword lends itself to serious errors and to deviation both from the marxist postulate that revolution isn’t a question of forms of organisation, and from the Leninist thesis that an organic solution can never be valid for all times and all places.

For parties operating in bourgeois countries with a stable parliamentary regime, organisation on a factory cell basis is less suitable than territorial units. It is also a theoretical error to assert that whilst parties organised on a territorial basis are social-democratic parties, those based on cells are genuine communist parties. In practice, the cell type of organisation makes it even more difficult to carry out the party’s task of unification amongst proletarians in trade and industry groups; a task that is all the more important the more unfavourable the situation is and the more the possibilities of proletarian organisation are reduced. Various drawbacks of a practical nature are connected with the proposal to organise the party on the exclusive basis of factory cells. In tsarist Russia, the issue appeared in a different context: relations between the owners of industry and the State were different and the obligation of posing the central question of power rendered the corporatist danger less acute.

The factory cell system does not increase workers’ influence in the party since the key links in the network all consist of the non-worker and ex-worker elements which constitute the official



party apparatus. Given the faulty working methods of the International, the watchword “bolshevisation”, from the organisational point of view, manifests as a pedestrian and inadequate application of the Russian experience, which has in many countries already prompted a paralysis, albeit unintentional, of spontaneous initiatives and proletarian and classist energies by means of an apparatus whose selection and functions are for the most part artificial.

Keeping the organisation of the party on a territorial basis doesn't mean having to relinquish party organs in the factories: indeed there must be communist groups there, linked to the party and subject to party discipline, in order to form its trade-union framework. This method establishes a much better connection with the masses and keeps the party's main organisation less visible.

## 5. — Discipline and fractions

Another aspect of the call for “Bolshevisation” is that complete centralisation of discipline and the strict prohibition of fractionism are considered the secure guarantee of the party's effectiveness.

The final court of appeal for all controversial questions is the central international organ, within which at least political (if not hierarchical) hegemony, is attributed to the Russian Communist Party.

Actually this guarantee is non-existent, and the whole approach to the problem is inadequate. In fact, rather than preventing the spread of fractionism within the International, it has been encouraged to assume masked and hypocritical forms instead. From a historical point of view, the overcoming of fractions in the Russian party wasn't an expedient, nor a magical recipe, applied on statutory grounds, but was both the result and the expression of a faithful delineation of the problems of doctrine and political action.

Disciplinary sanctions are one of the elements that ensure against degeneration, but only on condition that their application remains within the limits of exceptional cases, and doesn't become the norm and virtually the ideal of the party's functioning.

The solution doesn't reside in a useless increase in hierarchical authoritarianism, whose initial investiture is lacking both because of the incompleteness of the historical experiences in Russia, impressive though they are, and because even within the Old Guard, the custodian of the Bolshevik traditions, disagreements have been resolved in ways which cannot be considered as *a priori* the best ones. But neither does the solution lie in the systematic application of the principles of formal democracy, which for marxism have no other function than as organisational practices which can be occasionally convenient.

The communist parties must achieve an organic centralism which, whilst including maximum possible consultation with the base, ensures a spontaneous elimination of any grouping which aims to differentiate itself. This cannot be achieved with, as Lenin put it, the formal and mechanical prescriptions of a hierarchy, but through correct revolutionary politics.

The repression of fractionism isn't a fundamental aspect of the evolution of the party, though preventing it is.

To claim that the party and the International are mysteriously ensured against a relapse, or the tendency to relapse, into opportunism is not only fruitless and absurd but extremely dangerous, because such a relapse could indeed occur either due to changing circumstances, or to the playing out of residual social-democratic traditions. We have to admit that every differentiation of opinion not reducible to cases of conscience, or personal defeatism, may develop a useful function in the resolution of our problems and protect the party, and the proletariat in general, from grave dangers.

If such dangers become accentuated then differentiation will inevitably, but usefully, take on the fractionist form, and this might lead to schisms. However this won't happen because of childish reasons, because the leaders haven't put enough energy into repressing everybody, but only given the terrible hypothesis of a failure of the party and its becoming subservient to counter-revolutionary influences.

We have an example of the wrong method in the artificial solutions applied to the plight of the German party after the opportunist crisis in 1923, when whilst these artifices failed to eliminate fractionism they at the same time hindered the spontaneous determination within the ranks of the highly advanced German proletariat of the correct classist and revolutionary response to the degeneration of the party.

The danger of bourgeois influences acting on the class party doesn't appear historically as the organisation of fractions, but rather as a shrewd penetration stoking up unitary demagoguery and operating as a dictatorship from above, and immobilising initiatives by the proletarian vanguard.

This defeatist factor cannot be identified and eliminated by posing the question of discipline in order to prevent fractionist initiatives, but rather by successfully managing to orientated the party and the proletariat against such a peril at the moment when it manifests itself not just as a doctrinal revision, but as an express proposal for an important political manoeuvre with anticlassist consequences.

One negative effect of so-called bolshevisation has been the replacing of conscious and thoroughgoing political elaboration inside the party, corresponding to significant progress towards a really compact centralism, with superficial and noisy agitation for mechanical formulas of unity for unity's sake, and discipline for discipline's sake.

This method causes damage to both the party and the proletariat in that it holds back the realisation of the “true” communist party. Once applied to several sections of the International it becomes itself a serious indication of latent opportunism. At the moment, there doesn’t appear to be any international left opposition within the Comintern, but if the unfavourable factors we have mentioned worsen, the formation of such an opposition will be at the same time both a revolutionary necessity and a spontaneous reflex to the situation.

## **6. — Tactical Questions up to the 5th Congress**

Mistaken decisions have been made in the way the tactical problems posed by the previously mentioned international situations were settled. Like analogous mistakes made in the organisational sphere, they derive from the claim that everything can be deduced from problems previously faced by the Russian Communist party.

The united front tactic shouldn’t be interpreted as a political coalition with other so-called workers’ parties, but as a utilisation of immediate demands in particular situations to increase the communist party’s influence over the masses without compromising its autonomous position.

The basis for the United Front must therefore be sought in the proletarian organisations which workers join because of their social position and independently of their political faith or affiliation to an organised party. The reason is two-fold: firstly, communists aren’t prevented from criticising other parties, or gradually recruiting new members who used to be dependant on these other parties into the ranks of the communist party, and secondly, it ensures that the masses will understand the party when it eventually calls on them to mobilise behind its programme and under its exclusive leadership.

Experience has shown us countless times that the only way of ensuring a revolutionary application of the united front lies in rejecting political coalitions, whether permanent or temporary, along with committees which include representatives of different political parties as means of directing the struggle; also there should be no negotiations, proposals for common action and open letters to other parties from the communist party.

Practical experience has proved how fruitless these methods are, and even any initial effect has been discredited by the abuses to which they have been put.

The political united front based on the central demand of the seizure of the State becomes the “workers’ government” tactic. Here we have not only an erroneous tactic, but also a blatant contradiction of the principles of communism. Once the party issues the call for the assumption of power by the proletariat through the representative organisms of the bourgeois State apparatus, or even merely refrains from explicitly condemning such an eventuality, then it has

abandoned and rejected the communist programme not only vis-à-vis proletarian ideology, with all the inevitable damaging consequences, but because the party itself would be establishing and accrediting this ideological formulation. The revision to this tactic made at the 5th Congress, after the defeat in Germany, hasn't proved satisfactory and the latest developments in the realm of tactical experimentation justify calls for the abandonment of even the expression: "workers' government".

As far as the central problem of the State is concerned, the party should issue the call for the dictatorship of the proletariat and that alone. There is no other "Workers' Government".

The slogan "Workers' Government" leads to opportunism, and to opportunism alone, i.e. support for, or participation in, self-styled "pro-worker" governments of the bourgeois class.

None of this contradicts the slogan: "All Power to the Soviets" and to soviet type organisms (representative bodies elected by workers), even when opportunist parties predominate in them. The opportunist parties oppose the assumption of power by proletarian organisations since this is precisely the proletarian dictatorship (exclusion of non-workers from the elective organs and power) which the communist party alone will be able to accomplish.

Suffice to say the formula of the dictatorship of the proletariat has one synonym and one alone: "the government of the communist party".

## **7. — The Question of the "new tactics"**

The united front and the workers' government used to be justified on the following grounds: that just having communist parties wasn't enough to achieve victory since it was necessary to conquer the masses, and in order to conquer the masses, the influence of the social-democrats had to be fought on the terrain of those demands which are understood by all workers.

Today, a second step has been taken, and a perilous question is posed: to ensure our victory, they say, we must first ensure that the bourgeoisie is governing in a tolerant and compliant way, or, that classes intermediate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat should govern, allowing us to make preparations. This latter position, by admitting the possibility of a government originating from the middle classes, sinks to the total revision of Marx's doctrine and is equivalent to the counter revolutionary platform of reformism.

The first position aims to refer solely to the objective utility of conditions insofar as they allow propaganda, agitation and organisation to be better carried out. But as we have already pointed out with regard to particular situations, both are equally dangerous.

Everything leads us to predict that liberalism and bourgeois democracy, whether in antithesis

or in synthesis with the “fascist” method, will evolve in such a way as to exclude the communist party from their juridical guarantees — for what little they're worth — since it places itself outside them by negating such guarantees in its program. Such an evolution in no way contradicts the principles of bourgeois democracy, and in any case, it has real precedents in the work of all the so-called left-wing governments, and, for example, in the programme of the Italian Aventine Parliament. Any “freedom” given to the proletariat will just mean substantially greater freedom for counter-revolutionary agents to agitate and organise within its ranks. The only freedom for the proletariat lies in its dictatorship.

We have already mentioned that even if a left-wing government created conditions that we found useful, they could only be exploited if the party had consistently held to clearly autonomous positions. It isn't a matter of attributing diabolical cleverness to the bourgeoisie, but of holding on to the certainty — without which it is possible to call oneself a communist! — that during the final struggle the conquests of the proletariat will come up against a united front of the bourgeois forces, be they personified by Hindenburg, Macdonald, Mussolini or Noske.

To habituate the proletariat to picking out voluntary or involuntary supporters from within this bourgeois front would be to introduce a factor of defeat, even if any intrinsic weakness of any part of this front will clearly be a factor of victory.

In Germany after the election of Hindenburg, an electoral alliance with social-democracy and with other “republican” parties, i.e. bourgeois parties, such as the parliamentary alliance in the Prussian Landtag, was proclaimed in order to avoid a right-wing government; in France, support was given to the Cartel des gauches in the last municipal elections (the Clichy tactic). For the reasons given above such tactical methods must be declared unacceptable. Even the theses of the 2nd Congress of the C.I. on revolutionary parliamentarism impose on the communist party the duty of only operating on electoral terrain on the basis of rigorously independent positions.

The examples of recent tactics indicated above show a clear, though not complete, historical affinity with the traditional methods of the 2nd International: electoral blocs and collaborationism which were also justified by laying claim to a marxist interpretation.

Such methods represent a real danger to the principles and organisation of the International. Incidentally, no international congresses have passed resolutions which authorise them, and that includes the tactical theses presented at the 5th Congress.

## **8. — The Union Question**

On the global level, the International has successively modified its conception of the relationship between political and economic organisms. Herein lies a remarkable example of the method which, rather than having particular actions derive from principles, prefers to improvise

various new theories to justify actions chosen because of their apparent ease of execution and their likelihood of producing quick results.

The International originally supported the admission of unions to the Communist International, then it formed a Red International Labour Union. It was held that, since the unions were the best point of contact with the masses, each communist party should struggle for trade-union unity and therefore not create its own unions through scissions from unions led by the yellows, nevertheless on the International level the Bureau of the Amsterdam International was to be considered and treated not as an organisation of the proletarian masses, but as a counter-revolutionary political organ of the League of Nations.

At a certain point, based on considerations which were certainly very important, but limited mainly to a project for using the left-wing of the English union movement, it was announced that the Red International Labour Union should be abandoned in order to effect an organic unity, on an international scale, with the Amsterdam Bureau.

No amount of conjecture about changing circumstances can justify such a major policy shift since the question of the relations between international political organisations and trade unions is one of principle, inasmuch as it boils down to that of the relations between party and class for the revolutionary mobilisation.

Internal statutory guarantees weren't respected either since this decision was presented to the relevant international organs as a *fait accompli*.

The retention of "Moscow against Amsterdam" as our watchword hasn't prevented the struggle for trade-union unity in each nation and nor will it: in fact the liquidation of separatist tendencies in the unions (Germany and Italy) was only made possible by addressing the separatists' argument that the proletariat was being prevented from freeing itself from the influence of the Amsterdam International.

On the other hand, the apparent enthusiasm with which our party in France adhered to the proposition of world trade-union unity didn't prevent it from demonstrating an absolute incapacity to deal *de facto* with the problem of trade-union unity at a national level in a non-scissionist way.

The utility of a united front tactic on a world basis isn't however ruled out, even with union organisations that belong to the Amsterdam International.

The left wing of the Italian party has always supported and struggled for proletarian unity in the trade-unions, and this serves to distinguish it from the profoundly syndicalist and voluntarist pseudo-lefts which were fought by Lenin. Furthermore, the Left in Italy has a thoroughly Leninist conception of the problem of the relations between trade unions and factory councils.

On the basis of the Russian experience and of the relevant theses of the 2nd Congress, the Left rejects the serious deviation from principle which consists of depriving the trade unions, based on voluntary membership, of any revolutionary importance in order to substitute the utopian and reactionary concept of a constitutional apparatus with obligatory membership which extends organically over the entire area of the system of capitalist production. In practice, this error is expressed by an overestimation of the role of the factory councils to the extent of effectively boycotting the trade union.

## 9. — The Agrarian Question

The agrarian question has been defined by Lenin's theses at the 2nd Congress of the International. The main aim of these theses was to restore the problem of agricultural production to its historic place in the marxist system, and show that in an epoch where the premises for the socialisation of enterprises had already matured in the industrial economy, they were still lacking in the agricultural economy.

Far from delaying the proletarian revolution (which alone will create these premises), this state of affairs renders the problems of the poor peasants insoluble within the framework of industrial economy and bourgeois power. This allows the proletariat to link up its own struggle with freeing the poor peasant from a system of exploitation by the landed proprietors and the bourgeoisie, even if freeing the peasants doesn't coincide with a general change in the rural productive economy.

Large-scale landed property, deemed as such in law, is technically speaking composed of tiny productive enterprises. When the legal superstructure that holds it together is destroyed, we witness a redivision of land amongst the peasants. In reality, this is nothing other than the freeing of these small productive enterprises already separated from a collective exploitation. This can only happen if the property relations are broken up in a revolutionary way, but the protagonist of this rupture can only be the industrial proletariat. The reason for this is that the proletariat, as distinct from the peasant, isn't merely a victim of the relations of bourgeois production but is the historical product of its maturity, condemning it to clear the path to a new, different system of production. The proletariat will therefore find precious reinforcements in the revolt of the poor peasant. The essential elements in Lenin's tactical conclusions are, firstly, that there is a fundamental distinction to be made between the proletariat's relations with the peasant class, and its relations with the reactionary middle strata of the urban economy (mainly represented by the social-democratic parties); and secondly, there is the definitive principle of the pre-eminence and hegemony of the working class as leader of the revolution.

The peasant therefore appears at the moment of the conquest of power as a revolutionary factor, but if during the revolution his ideology is modified as regards the old forms of authority

and legality, it doesn't change much with regard to the relations of production which remain the traditional ones of isolated family farms in mutual competition with one another. Thus the peasant still represents a threat to the construction of the Socialist economy, and only the large-scale development of productive capacity and agricultural technology is likely to interest him.

On the tactical and organisational plane the landless agricultural proletariat (day-labourers) must be considered, in Lenin's view, the same as the rest of the proletariat, and be incorporated into the same framework; the policy of proletarian alliance with the poor peasants — working alone on their plots of land on whatever level of sufficiency — becomes a policy of mere neutralisation with regard to the middle peasant, who is characterised as being both a victim of certain capitalist relations and an exploiter of labour. Finally, there is the wealthy peasant who is generally an exploiter of labour and the direct enemy of the revolution.

In the field of agrarian tactics, the International must avoid those mistaken applications already discernible for instance in the policies of the French party, which is drawn to the idea of a new type of peasant revolution to be considered on the same level as the worker's revolution, or to the belief that the revolutionary movement of the workers may be determined by an insurrection in the countryside, whilst in fact the actual relationship is the other way around.

The peasant, once won over to the communist programme, and therefore accessible to political organisation, should become a member of the communist party; this is the only way to combat the rise of parties composed solely of peasants inevitably prey to counter-revolutionary influences.

The Krestintern (Peasants' International) must incorporate the peasant organisations of all countries characterised, like workers' trade-unions, by the fact of accepting as members all those who have the same immediate economic interests. Also the tactics of political negotiations, the united front, or constitution of fractions within the peasant parties — even with the intention of breaking them up — must be rejected.

This tactical norm is not at odds with the relations established between the Bolsheviks and the social-revolutionaries during the civil war period when the new representative organisations of the proletariat and the peasants already existed.

## **10. — The National Question**

Lenin has also produced a fundamental clarification of the theory of the popular movements in colonial countries and in certain exceptionally backward countries. Even though internal economic development and the expansion of foreign capital hasn't provided a mature basis for modern class struggle in these countries, demands are being made which can only be resolved



by insurrectional struggle and the defeat of world imperialism.

In the epoch of struggle for proletarian revolution in the metropolises, the complete realisation of these two conditions will allow the launching of a struggle which, nevertheless, will take on locally the aspects of a conflict not of class but of races and nationalities.

The fundamental tenets of the Leninist conception nevertheless still remain that the world struggle will be directed by organs of the revolutionary proletariat, and that the indigenous class struggle, and the independent development of local communist parties, must be encouraged, and never held back or stifled.

The extension, however, of these considerations to countries in which the capitalist regime and the bourgeois State apparatus has been established for a long time constitutes a danger, insofar as here the national question and patriotic ideology become counter-revolutionary devices, and serve only to disarm the proletariat as a class. Such deviations appear, for example, in the concessions made by Radek with regard to the German nationalists fighting against the inter-allied occupation.

The International must also call for the stamping out in Czechoslovakia of any nationalist and dualist reaction within the proletarian organisations since the two races are at the same historical level and their common economic environment is completely evolved.

To elevate the struggle of the national minorities, per se to the level of a matter of principle is therefore to distort the communist conception, since altogether different criteria are required to discern whether such struggles offer revolutionary possibilities or reactionary developments.

## **11. — Russian Questions**

The new political economy of the Russian State, based mainly on Lenin's 1921 speech on the tax in kind and Trotsky's report to the 4th World Congress, is evidently an important matter for the Communist International. Given the condition of the Russian economy, and the fact that the bourgeoisie remains in power in the other countries, marxists couldn't have presented otherwise the prospects for the development of the world revolution, and the construction of the Socialist economy.

The serious political difficulties that the internal relations of social forces, and the problems of productive technology and foreign relations have caused the Russian State, have led to a series of divergences within the Russian Communist Party; and it is really deplorable that the international communist movement hasn't found a way of making more soundly based and authoritative pronouncements on the matter.

In the first discussion with Trotsky, his considerations on the internal life of the party and its new course were undoubtedly correct, and his observations on the development of the State's political economy were also, on the whole, clearly revolutionary and proletarian. In the second discussion he was no less justified when he remarked on the International's mistakes, and demonstrated that the best traditions of the Bolsheviks did not militate in favour of the way the Comintern was being led.

The way the party reacted to this internal debate was inadequate and contrived, due to the well-known method of relying on anti-fractionist, and even worse, anti-bonapartist intimidation based on absolutely nothing of substance. As to the latest discussion, it must above all be realised that it revolves around problems of an international nature, and just because the majority of the Russian Communist Party has pronounced on the issue, there is no reason why the International cannot discuss and pronounce on it in its turn; the question still stands even if has ceased to be asked by the defeated Opposition.

As has often happened, questions of procedure and discipline have stifled really essential questions. What is at issue here is not the defence of the rights of a minority, whose leaders at least are co-responsible for numerous errors committed on the international level, but rather questions of vital importance for the world movement.

The Russian question must be brought before the International for an in-depth study. The following features must be taken into account: today the Russian economy is composed, according to Lenin, of elements that are pre-bourgeois, bourgeois, State-capitalist and socialist. State-controlled large-scale industry is socialist insofar as it is production organised by, and in the hands of a politically proletarian State. The distribution of the products derived from this industry operates however under a capitalist form, namely, through a competitive free-market mechanism.

One cannot deny in principle that workers will not only be kept in less than brilliant economic circumstances by this system (in fact that is the case) even if they do accept it because of the revolutionary consciousness they have acquired, but that it will also evolve in the direction of an increased extraction of surplus value by means of the price paid by the worker for foodstuffs, and the prices paid by the State for its purchases, as well as the conditions it obtains in concessions, commerce and in all its relations with foreign capitalism. It is therefore necessary to ask whether the socialist elements in the Russian economy are increasing or decreasing, a problem that also means taking into account the degree of technical efficiency and how well the State industries are organised.

The building of full socialism extended to production and distribution, to industry and agriculture, is impossible in just one country, but the progressive development of the socialist elements in the Russian economy can nevertheless be achieved by thwarting the plans of the

counter-revolutionaries; supported inside Russia by the rich peasants, new bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, and outside the country by the imperialist powers. Whether such counter-revolutionary plotting takes the form of internal or external aggression, or of a progressive sabotage and influencing of Russian social and State life such as to force a progressive involution and deproletarianisation of its main features, it is a fundamental condition for success that all parties belonging to the International collaborate with each other and are able to make their contribution.

Above all, it is a matter of assuring the Russian proletariat and the Russian Communist Party of the active support of the proletarian vanguard, especially in the imperialist countries. Not only must aggression be prevented and pressure is exerted against the bourgeois States as regards their relations with Russia, but most importantly of all, the Russian party needs to be helped by its brother parties to resolve its problems. Whilst these other parties, it is true, do not possess direct experience of governmental problems, nonetheless they can help resolve them by acting as a classist and revolutionary coefficient, with experience derived directly from the real class struggles taking place in their respective countries.

As we have shown above, the internal relationships of the International do not lend themselves to this task. Urgent changes therefore need to be made in order to redress the problems in the realm of politics and in the tactical and organisational spheres that have been exacerbated by “bolshevisation”.

## III. — Italian Questions

### 1. — The Italian Situation (1926)

Evaluations of the Italian situation that attribute decisive value to the insufficient development of industrial capitalism are wrong.

The weak expansion of industry in a quantitative sense, along with its relatively late historical appearance, were counterbalanced by a set of other circumstances which allowed the bourgeoisie to completely entrench itself politically during the period of the Risorgimento and develop an extremely rich and complex tradition of government.

The political polarities that historically characterise conflicting parties — such as the old Left and Right division, clericalism and masonry, and democracy and fascism — cannot be automatically identified with the social differences which exist between landed proprietors and capitalists, and the big and petty bourgeoisie.

The fascist movement must be understood as the attempt to politically unify the conflicting

interests of various bourgeois groups under the banner of counter-revolution. Fascism, created and directly fostered by the entire upper classes (landowners, industrialists, commercial sectors, bankers, supported by the traditional State apparatus, the monarchy, the Church, and masonry) pursued this aim by mobilising elements within the disintegrating middle classes which, in close alliance with the bourgeoisie as a whole, it has managed to deploy against the proletariat.

What has taken place in Italy shouldn't be interpreted as the arrival in power of a new social strata, as the formation of a new State apparatus with a new programme and ideology, nor as the defeat of part of the bourgeoisie, whose interests would be better served by the adoption of liberal and parliamentary methods. The Democrats and the Liberals, the Nittis and the Giolittis, are the protagonists of a phase of counter-revolutionary struggle which is dialectically linked to the fascist phase and just as decisive in effecting the proletarian defeat. In fact it was precisely their concessionary politics, with the complicity of reformists and maximalists, which allowed the bourgeoisie to resist the pressure from the proletariat and head it off during the post-war period of demobilisation, at precisely a time when every component of the dominant class was unprepared for a frontal attack.

Directly favoured in this period by governments, the bureaucracy, the police, judiciary, army etc., Fascism has since gone on to completely replace the bourgeoisie's old political personnel. However, we shouldn't be fooled by this and neither should it serve as a reason for rehabilitating parties and groups who were removed not because they achieved better conditions for the working class, but because for the time being they had completed their anti-proletarian task.

## **2. — Political Positions of the Communist Left**

As the above situation was taking shape, the group which formed the Communist Party set out with these criteria: a break from the illusory dualisms of the bourgeois and parliamentary political scene and an affirmation of the revolutionary antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; propaganda amongst the proletariat aimed at destroying the illusion that the middle classes were capable of producing a political general staff, of taking power and clearing the way for proletarian victories; instilling confidence in the proletariat in its own historic task through propaganda based on a series of critical, political and tactical positions which were original and autonomous, and solidly linked through successive situations.

The tradition of this political current goes back to the left wing of the Socialist party before the war. Whilst a majority capable of struggling both against the errors of the reformists and the syndicalists (the latter having personified the proletarian left until then) was formed at the congresses of Reggio Emilia (1912) and Ancona (1914), an extreme left aspiring to even more radical classist solutions also emerged within this majority. Important problems for the working class were correctly resolved during this period, namely with regard to the questions of electoral

tactics, links with the trades-unions, colonial war and freemasonry.

During the World War, virtually the entire party opposed the union sacré politics, and at successive meetings and Congresses (Bologna, May 1915; Rome, February 1917; Florence, November 1917; Rome, 1918), its extreme Left-wing, now clearly differentiated, defended the following Leninist positions: the rejection of national defence and defeatism; exploitation of military defeat to pose the question of power; and unceasing struggle against the opportunist trade-union and parliamentary leaders along with the call for their expulsion from the party.

Immediately after the war, *Il Soviet* became the mouthpiece of the Extreme Left, and the first newspaper to support the policies of the Russian revolution and to confront anti-marxist, opportunist, syndicalist, and anarchistic misinterpretations. It correctly set out the essential problems of the proletarian dictatorship and the party's tasks, and from the very start defended the necessity of a split in the Socialist Party.

This same group supported electoral abstentionism but the 2nd Congress of the International would dismiss its conclusions. Its abstentionism however didn't derive from the anti-marxist theoretical errors of the anarcho-syndicalist type, as its' resolute polemics against the anarchist press have shown. The application of the abstentionist tactic was recommended above all for fully developed parliamentary democracies, because this political environment creates particular obstacles to the winning over of the masses to an accurate understanding of the word "dictatorship"; difficulties which, in our opinion, continue to be underestimated by the International.

In the second place, abstentionism was proposed at a time when huge struggles were setting even hugger mass movements into motion (unfortunately not the case today), and not as a tactic applicable for all times and all places.

With the 1919 elections, the bourgeois Nitti government opened up an immense safety valve to the revolutionary pressure, and diverted the proletarian offensive and the attention of the party by exploiting its tradition of unbridled electoralism. "*Il Soviet's*" abstentionism was then entirely correct, in that it responded to the true causes of the proletarian disaster that ensued.

At the subsequent Bologna Conference (October 1919), only the abstentionist minority posed correctly the question of a split with the reformists, but it sought in vain to come to an agreement with a section of the maximalists on this point, even after abstentionism had been renounced in order to achieve it. The attempt having failed, the abstentionist fraction remained the only section of the party which, up until the 2nd World Congress, worked on a national scale for the formation of the communist party.

This was therefore the group which represented the spontaneous adherence, setting out from its own experiences and traditions, of the left of the Italian proletariat to the policies of Lenin

and Bolshevism which had lately emerged victorious with the Russian revolution.

### **3. — The work of the Party's Left leadership**

Within the new communist party, constituted at Leghorn in January 1921, the abstentionists made every effort to forge solid links with other groupings in the party. But whilst for some of these groups it was international relations alone which necessitated the split from the opportunists, for the abstentionists (who for discipline's sake had expressly renounced their positions on elections) and indeed for many other elements besides, it was because the theses of the International and the lessons of recent political struggles were completely consistent with each other.

In its work, the interpretation of the Italian situation and the tasks of the proletariat mentioned earlier inspired the party leadership. With hindsight it is clear that the delay in the formation of the revolutionary Party (for which the other groups were responsible) made the subsequent proletarian retreat inevitable.

In order to place the proletariat in the best position during the ensuing battles, the leadership took the stance that although the greatest efforts should be made to use the traditional apparatus of the Red organisations, it was also necessary to warn the proletariat not to count on anything from the maximalists and reformists, who would even go so far as accepting a peace treaty with fascism.

From its very inception, the party defended the principle of trade-union unity, going on to propose the central postulate of a united front which culminated in the formation of the Labour Alliance. Whatever opinions one might have about the political united front, the fact is that the situation in Italy in 1921-22 made it impossibility; in fact the party never received any invitation to attend any meetings aimed at founding an alliance of parties. The party didn't intervene at the meeting to constitute the trade-union alliance called by the railway workers because it didn't want to lend itself to manoeuvres which might have compromised the alliance itself, and which might have been blamed on the party; it had already shown beforehand though that it approved of the initiative by stating that all communist workers within the new organisation would observe discipline towards it.

Certain contacts between political groups would eventually take place; the communist party wouldn't refuse to take part but they would come to nothing, demonstrating both the impossibility of arriving at an understanding on the terrain of political action, and the defeatism of every other group. During the retreat, the leadership was able to preserve the confidence of the workers in their own class, and raise the political consciousness of the vanguard, by heading off the traditional manoeuvrings of pseudo-revolutionary groups and parties within the

proletariat. Despite the efforts of the party, it was not until later, August 1922, that a generalised mobilisation took place; but proletarian defeat was inevitable and from then on fascism, openly supported in their violent campaigns by the forces of a declaredly **liberal democratic** State, became master of the country. The “March on Rome” which happened afterwards merely legitimised fascism’s predomination in a formal sense.

Even now, despite reduced proletarian activity, the party’s influence still predominated over the maximalists and reformists, its progress having already been demonstrated by the 1921 election results and the extensive consultations that took place within the Confederation of Labour.

#### **4. — Relations between the Italian Left and the Communist International**

The Rome Congress, held in March 1922, brought to light a theoretical divergence between the Italian Left and most of the International; a divergence expressed before, rather badly, by our delegations at the 3rd World Congress and the Enlarged Executive of February 1922, where, especially on the first occasion, errors of a “leftist” nature were committed. Fortunately the Rome Theses constituted the theoretical and political liquidation of any peril of left-wing opportunism in the Italian Party.

The only difference in practice between the party and the international was about what tactics to follow with regard to the maximalists, but the unitarian victory at the socialist Congress in October 1921 appeared to have settled this.

The Rome Theses were adopted as the party’s contribution to the International’s decision-making not as an immediate line of action; this was confirmed by the party directorate at the Enlarged Executive of 1922, and if no theoretical discussion took place there, this was because of a decision by the International which for discipline’s sake the party complied with.

In August 1922 however, the International wouldn’t interpret the Italian situation in same way as the Party directorate, but concluded that the situation in Italy was unstable in terms of a weakening of State resistance. It therefore thought that a fusion with the maximalists would strengthen the party, considering the split between the maximalists and unitarians as decisive, as opposed to the party directorate that wished to apply the lessons learnt during the vast strike manoeuvre in August.

It is from this moment that the two political lines diverge in a definitive way. At the 4th World Congress in December 1922, the old leadership opposed the majority thesis, and on returning to Italy, the delegates would pass the matter to a Commission, unanimously declining to take any responsibility for the decision, though of course retaining their own administrative functions.

Then came the arrests in February 1923 and the big offensive against the party. Finally the Enlarged Executive of June 1923 would depose the old executive and replace it with a completely different one. Several party leaders would simply resign as a logical consequence. In May 1924, a Party consultative conference still gave the Left an overwhelming majority over the Centre and the Right and thus it arrived at the 5th World Congress in 1924.

## **5. — The “Ordinivist” tradition of the present leadership**

The “Ordine Nuovo” group was formed in Turin by a group of intellectuals, who established contacts with the proletarian masses in industry at a time when the abstentionist fraction in Turin already had a large following. The volatile ideology of this group is mainly derived from philosophical conceptions of a bourgeois and idealist nature partly inherited from Benedetto Croce. This group aligned itself with communist directives very late in the day, and would always display residual errors linked to its origins. It understood the significance of the Russian revolution too late to be able to apply it usefully to the proletarian struggle in Italy. In November 1917, comrade Gramsci published an article in *Avanti!* asserting that the Russian revolution had given the lie to Marx’s historical materialism and the theories in “*Capital*”, and gave an essentially idealist explanation. The extreme left current that the youth federation belonged to responded immediately to this article.

The subsequent ideological development of the “Ordinivist” group, as their publication *Ordine Nuovo* shows, has led to a non-marxist and non-Leninist interpretation of the workers’ movement. The questions of the role of the unions and the party, armed struggle and conquest of power, and the construction of socialism are not posed correctly in their theory, and they have evolved instead the conception of a systematic organisation of the labouring classes which was “necessary” rather than “voluntary”, and strictly bound up with the mechanism of capitalist industrial production.

Setting out from the internal commissions, this system was supposed to culminate simultaneously in the proletarian and Communist International, in the Soviets and in the workers’ State by way of the factory councils, which were held to embody the latter even before the collapse of capitalist power.

And what is more, even during the bourgeois epoch, this system was supposed to assume the function of constructing the new economy by calling for and exercising workers’ control over production.

Later on, all the non-marxist aspects of “Ordinivist” ideology — utopianism, Proudhon inspired syndicalism, and economic gradualism before the conquest of power, i.e., reformism — were apparently dropped in order to be gradually substituted with the entirely different theories



of Leninism. However, the fact that this substitution took place on a superficial and fictitious level could only have been avoided if the “Ordinovists” hadn’t split from and opposed the Left; a group whose traditions, rather than converging with the Bolsheviks in an entirely impulsive way, represented a serious contribution, derived not from academic and bookish dissertations on bourgeois tomes but from proletarian class experience. Certainly the “Ordinovists” hadn’t been prevented from learning and improving within the strictly collaborative framework which was lacking later on. As it turned out, we greeted the announcements of the “Ordinovist” leaders with a certain tinge of irony when they announced that they were bolshevising the very people who had actually set them on the road to Bolshevik positions by serious and marxist means, rather than by chattering about mechanistic and bureaucratic procedures.

Up until shortly before the 1920 World Congress, the “Ordinovists” were opposed to a split in the old party, and they posed all trade-union questions incorrectly. The International’s representative in Italy had to polemicise against them on the questions of the factory councils and the premature constitution of the Soviets.

In April 1920, the Turin Section approved the famous Ordine Nuovo theses, which were drawn up by comrade Gramsci and adopted by a committee composed of both “Ordinovists” and Abstentionists. These theses, cited in the 2nd Congress’s resolution, in fact expressed, despite disagreements about elections, the common thinking of the nascent communist fraction; they weren’t distinctly “Ordinovist” positions, but consisted of points already clarified and accepted by the party’s left-wing long before.

The “Ordinovists” would rally around the Left’s positions on the International for a while, but the thinking expressed in the Rome Theses was essentially different from theirs, even if they considered it opportune to vote for them.

The true precursor of “Ordinovism’s” present adherence to the tactics and general line of the International was really comrade Tasca and his opposition to the Left at the Rome Congress.

Given, on the one hand, the “Ordinovist” group’s characteristic particularism and its taste for the concrete inherited from idealistic bourgeois positions, and, on the other hand, the superficial and therefore incomplete adherences allowed for by the International’s leadership, we are forced to conclude, despite all their loud protestations of orthodoxy, that the theoretical adherence (of decisive importance in terms of providing a basis for actual policies) of the Ordinovists to Leninism is about as worthless as their adherence to the Rome Theses.

## **6. — The political work of the present Party leadership**

From 1923 until now, the work of the Party leadership, which we must bear in mind took place in difficult circumstances, has led to mistakes which are essentially similar to those

pointed out apropos the international question, but which have been severely aggravated at least partly by the initial Ordinovist deviations.

Participating in the 1924 elections was a very fortunate political act, but one cannot say the same about the proposal for joint action with the socialist parties nor of the way it was labelled “proletarian unity”. Just as deplorable was the excessive tolerance shown towards some of the “Terzini’s” electoral manoeuvres. But the most serious problems are posed apropos the open crisis that followed Matteotti’s assassination.

The leadership’s policies were based on the absurd view that the weakening of fascism would propel the middle classes into action first, and then the proletariat. This implied on the one hand a lack of faith in the capacity of the proletariat to act as a class, despite its continued alertness under the suffocating strictures of fascism, and on the other, an over-estimation of the initiative of the middle-class. In fact, even without referring to the clear marxist theoretical positions on this matter, the central lesson to draw from the Italian experience has been that the intermediary layers will passively tail along behind the strongest and may therefore back either side. Thus in 1919-1920 they backed the proletariat, then between 1921-22-23 they went behind fascism, and now, after a significant period of major upheaval in 1924-25, they are backing fascism again.

The leadership were mistaken in abandoning parliament and participating in the first meetings of the Aventine when they should have remained in Parliament, launched a political attack on the government, and immediately taken up a position opposed to the moral and constitutional prejudices of the Aventine, which would determine the outcome of the crisis in fascism’s favour. This wouldn’t have prevented the communists from making the decision to abandon parliament, and would have allowed them to do so whilst keeping their specific identity intact, and allowed them to leave at the only appropriate time, i.e. when the situation was ripe to call on the masses to take direct action. It was one of those crucial moments which affect how future situations will turn out; the error was therefore a fundamental one, a decisive test of the leadership’s capabilities, and it led to a highly unfavourable utilisation by the working class both of the weakening of fascism and the resounding failure of the Aventine.

The Return to Parliament in November 1924 and the statement issued by Repossi were beneficial, as the wave of proletarian consensus showed, but they came too late. The leadership wavered for a long time, and only finally made a decision under pressure from the party and the Left. The preparation of the Party was made on the basis of dreary directives and a fantastically erroneous assessment of the situation’s latent possibilities (report by Gramsci to the Central Committee, August 1924). The preparation of the masses, which leant towards supporting the Aventine rather than wishing for its collapse, was in any case made worse when the party proposed to the opposition parties that they set up their own Anti-parliament. This tactic in any case conflicted with the decisions of the International, which never envisaged proposals being made to parties which were clearly bourgeois; worse still, it lay totally outside the domain of

communist principles and tactics, and outside the marxist conception of history. Any possible explanation that the leadership might have had for this tactic aside — an explanation which was doomed to have very limited repercussions anyway — there is no doubt that it presented the masses with an illusory Anti-State, opposed to and warring against the traditional State apparatus, whilst in the historical perspective of our programme, there is no basis for an Anti-State other than the representation of the one productive class, namely, the Soviet.

To call for an Anti-parliament, relying in the country on the support of the workers' and peasants' committees, meant entrusting the leadership of the proletariat to representatives of groups that are socially capitalist, like Amendola, Agnelli, Albertini, etc.

Besides the certainty that such a situation won't arise, a situation which could only be described as a betrayal anyway, just putting it forward in the first place as a point of view derived from a communist proposal involves a betrayal of principles and a weakening of the revolutionary preparation of the proletariat.

Other aspects of the work of the leadership also lend themselves to criticism. There has been a welter of watchwords that correspond neither to any genuine possibility of realisation, nor to any visible signs of agitation outside the party machine. The core demand for workers and peasants committees, justified in a confusing and contradictory way, has been neither understood nor abided by.

## **7. — The party's trade-union activity**

During the March 1925 metalworkers strike another serious mistake was made. The leadership should have predicted that the proletariat's disillusionment with the Aventine would propel it into class actions and a wave of strikes. If the leadership had foreseen this, it might have been possible to push the F.I.O.M. into a national strike (just as it had managed to get it to take part in the strike initiated by the fascists) by setting up a metalworkers agitation committee based on the local organisations, which throughout the country had been highly supportive of the strike.

The stance the leadership has taken on the trade unions hasn't corresponded clearly with the watchword of trade-union unification inside the Confederation; a watchword that should still be adhered to despite the organisational decomposition of the latter. The party's directives on the unions have shown evidence of Ordinovist errors as regards action in the factories: not only has it created, or is proposing to create, a multitude of conflicting organisms in the factories, but it has frequently issued watchwords which depreciate trade-unions and the idea of their necessity as organs of proletarian struggle.

A consequence of this error was the paltry settlement with FIAT in Turin; as was the

confusion surrounding the factory elections, where the criteria for choosing between classist or party lists of candidates, that is on trade-union terrain, wasn't posed correctly.

## **8. — Party activity in agrarian and national matters**

It is quite correct to have issued the call for the formation of peasant defence associations, but this work has been conducted too exclusively from on high by a party bureau.

Despite the situation's inherent difficulties, it is necessary to declare that viewing our tasks in this area in a bureaucratic way is dangerous, indeed the same goes for every other party activity.

A correct relationship between peasant associations and workers' unions must be clearly established along the following lines: whilst agricultural wage labourers must form a federation which adheres to the Confederazione del Lavoro, a strict alliance must exist between the latter and the peasant defence associations at both the central and local levels.

All regionalist, and particularly "southernist", conceptions (and there is already some evidence of this) must be avoided when dealing with the agrarian question. This is equally true with regard to the demands for regional autonomy which have been advanced by certain new parties; who we must fight openly as reactionaries, instead of sitting around the table with them engaging in pointless negotiations.

The tactic of seeking an alliance with the left wing of the Popular Party (Miglioli) and the peasant's party has not given favourable results.

Once again concessions have been made to politicians who are outside any classist tradition; without obtaining the expected shift in the masses this has, on the contrary, often disorientated parts of our organisation. It is equally wrong to overestimate the significance of the manoeuvres amongst the peasantry for a hypothetical political campaign against the influence of the Vatican; the problem certainly exists but it won't be resolved adequately by such means.

## **9. — The Leadership's organisational work**

There is no doubt that the work of reorganising the party after the fascist storm has produced some excellent results. However, it has retained an overly technical character; instead of ensuring centralisation by means of clear and uniform statutory norms applicable to every comrade and local committee, the attempt was made to enforce it solely by means of interventions by the central apparatus. It would have been a major step forward to have allowed the base organisations to return to electing their own committees, especially during the periods when the circumstances most favoured it.

Regarding the increase, then the subsequent decrease, in the party's membership, not to mention the departure of elements recruited during the Matteotti crisis who are leaving with the same facility as they arrived, it goes to show how matters such as these depend on changing circumstances rather than on any hypothetical advantages that a general change of direction might have.

The effects and advantages of the month-long campaign of recruitment have been exaggerated. As for organisation at the level of the cell, evidently the leadership must put into effect the Comintern's general resolutions, a matter we have already referred to elsewhere. However, it has been done in an irregular and uneven fashion involving a host of contradictions, and only after much pressure from the rank-and-file has a certain accommodation been reached.

It would be better if the system of inter-regional secretaries was substituted with a Corp of inspectors, thereby establishing direct links which were political rather than technical between the leadership and the traditional rank-and-file organisations of the party i.e., the provincial federations. The principal duty of the inspectors should be to actively intervene when the fundamental party organisation needs to be rebuilt, and then look after and assist it until normal functioning is established.

## **10. — The leadership and the question of fractionism**

The campaign which reached its climax during the preparation for our 3rd congress, and which was deliberately launched after the 5th World Congress, rather than aiming to propagandise and elaborate on the directives of the International throughout the party with the aim of creating a really collective and advanced consciousness, aimed instead to get comrades to renounce their adhesion to the opinions of the Left as quickly as possible and with minimum effort. No thought was given to whether this would be useful or damaging to the party with regard to its effectiveness toward the external enemy, the only objective was that of attaining by any means this internal objective.

We have spoken elsewhere, from a historical and theoretical perspective, about the delusion of repressing fractionism from above. The 5th Congress, in the case of Italy, accepted that the Left were refraining from working as an opposition although still participating in all aspects of party work, except within the political leadership, and it therefore agreed that pressure on them from above should be stopped. This agreement was however broken by the leadership in a campaign which consisted not of ideological postulates and tactics, but of disciplinary accusations towards individual comrades who were brought before federal congresses and focused on in a one-sided way.

On the announcement of the Congress, an "Entente Committee" was spontaneously

constituted with the aim of preventing individuals and groups from reacting by leaving the party, and in order to channel the action of all the Left comrades into a common and responsible line, within the strict limits of discipline, with the proviso that the rights of all comrades to be involved in party consultations was guaranteed. This action was seized on by the leadership who launched a campaign which portrayed the comrades of the Left as fractionists and scissionists, whose right to defend themselves was withdrawn and against whom votes were obtained from the federal committees by exerting pressure from above.

This campaign continued with a fractionist revision of the party apparatus and of the local cadres, through the way in which written contributions to the discussion were presented, and by the refusal to allow representatives of the Left to participate in the federal congresses. Crowning it all there was the unheard of system of automatically attributing the votes of all those absent from conference to the theses of the leadership.

Whatever the effect of such measures may be in terms of producing a simple numerical majority, in fact rather than enhancing the ideological consciousness of the party and its prestige amongst the masses they have damaged it. If the worst consequences have been avoided this is due to the moderation of the comrades of the Left; who have put up with such a hammering not because they believed it to be in the least bit justified, but solely because they are devoted to the party cause.

## **11. — Draft programme of party work**

The premises from which, in the Left's view, the general and particular duties of the party should spring, are defined in the preceding theses. It is evident, however, that the question can only be tackled on the basis of international decisions. The Left can therefore only outline a draft programme of action as a proposal to the International about how the tasks of its Italian section might best be realised.

The party must prepare the proletariat for a revival of its classist activity and for the struggle against fascism by drawing on the harsh experiences of recent times. At the same time, we need to disenchant the proletariat of the notion that there is anything to be gained from a change in bourgeois politics, or that any help will be forthcoming from the urban middle classes. The experiences of the liberal-democratic period can be used to prevent the re-emergence of these pacifistic illusions.

The party will address no proposals for joint actions to the parties of the anti-fascist opposition, neither will it engage in politics aimed at detaching a left-wing from this opposition, and nor will it attempt to push so-called left-wing parties "further to the left".

In order to mobilise the masses around its programme, the party will subscribe to the tactic of

the united front from below and will keep an attentive eye on the economic situation in order to formulate immediate demands. The party will refrain from advocating as a central political demand the accession of a government that concedes guarantees of liberty; it will not put forward “liberty for all” as an objective of class conquest, but will emphasise on the contrary that freedom for the workers will entail infringing the liberties of the exploiters and the bourgeoisie.

Faced today with the grave problem of a weakening of the class unions and of the other immediate organs of the proletariat, the party will call for the defence of the traditional red unions and for the necessity of their rebirth. In its work in the factories, it will avoid creating organs if they tend to undermine this rebuilding of the trade unions. Taking the present situation into account, the party will work towards getting the unions to operate within the framework of “union factory sections”; which representing a strong union tradition, are the appropriate bodies for leading workers’ struggles insofar as today it is precisely in the factories where opportunities for struggle exist. We will attempt to get the illegal internal commissions elected through the union factory section, with the reservation that, as soon as it is possible (it isn’t at present) the committees be elected by an assembly of the factory personnel.

As regards the question of organisation in the countryside, reference can be made to what we have said regarding the agrarian situation.

Once all the possibilities for proletarian groups to organise have been utilised to the maximum, we may resort to the watchword “workers’ and peasants’ committees” observing the following criteria:

a) The watchword of constituting workers’ and peasants’ committees must not be launched in a casual and intermittent way, but set forth in an energetic campaign when a changing situation has made the need for a new framework clear to the masses, that is: when the watchword can be identified not just as a call to organise, but as a definite call to action;

b) The nucleus of the committees will have to be constituted by representatives from the traditional mass organisations, such as the unions and analogous organisms, despite these having been mutilated by reaction. It must not include convocations of political delegates;

c) At a later date we’ll be able to call on the committees to have elections, but we will have to clarify beforehand that these are not Soviets i.e. organs of proletarian government, but expressions of a local and national alliance of all the exploited for their joint defence.

Regarding relations with fascist unions: inasmuch as today the latter don’t present themselves even in a formal sense as voluntary associations of the masses, there must be an overall rejection of the call to penetrate these unions in order to break them up. The watchword of the rebuilding the Red unions must be issued in conjunction with the denunciation of the fascist unions.

The organisational measures that should be adopted inside the party have been indicated in part. Under present conditions, it is necessary to co-ordinate such measures with requirements that we can't go into here (clandestinity). It is nevertheless an urgent necessity that they are systematised and formulated as clear statutory norms binding on all in order to avoid confusing healthy centralism with blind obedience to arbitrary and conflicting instructions; a method which puts genuine party unity in jeopardy.

## **12. — Perspectives on the Party's internal situation**

The internal political and organisational problems which our party faces cannot be resolved in a definitive way within the national framework, as the solution depends on the working out of the internal situation and on the politics of the International as a whole. It would a serious and shameful mistake if the national and international leaders continue to deploy the stupid method of exerting pressure from above against the Left and the reduction of complex problems of Party politics and ideology to cases of personal conduct.

Since the Left is going to stick to its opinions, those comrades who have no intention of renouncing them should be allowed, in an atmosphere free of scheming and mutual recriminations, to carry out the loyal commitment they have given, that is; to abide by the decisions of the party organs and to renounce all oppositional work, whilst being exempted from the requirement of participating in the leadership. Evidently this proposal shows that the situation is far from perfect, but it would be dangerous to delude the party that these internal difficulties can be eliminated by simply applying mechanical measures to organisational problems, or by taking up personal positions. To spread such an illusion would be tantamount to making a severe attack on the party.

Only by abandoning this small-minded approach, appreciating the true magnitude of the problem, and placing it before the party and the international, will we truly achieve the aim of avoiding a poisoning of the party atmosphere and move on to tackle all the difficulties which the party is called on to face today.



Amadeo Bordiga 1926

# The Communist Left in the Third International

Bordiga at the 6th Enlarged Executive Meeting of the Communist International

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**Source:** <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/3909/bordiga0.html>;

**HTML Mark-up:** Andy Blunden 2003.

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“Since the Russian Revolution is the first great stage of the world revolution it is also our revolution. Its problems are our problems, and every militant in the revolutionary International has not only the right, but also the duty, to collaborate in their solution.”

Amadeo Bordiga, at the 20th session,  
15th March 1926

Seventy years ago the wave of proletarian strife and insurrection which had brought the 1st World War to a close was all but over. Instead of being strengthened and supported by the establishment of a European soviet republic and beyond, the Russian proletariat had been left high and dry. Today, in the light of historical hindsight, it is easy to see that what had been salvaged from the great Russian Revolution was the skeleton of a once heroic revolutionary party that was now being transformed into the central arm of a brutal state apparatus. Two years after the death of Lenin, Stalin was already well on the way to establishing himself as the sole unquestioned leader in the party and the state. Ever since the 10th Party Congress in 1921 (at the time of the Kronstadt uprising and the introduction of NEP) factions had been officially disavowed inside the Russian Party. By 1926 all genuine political debate about the key issue of what had happened to the Revolution and the prospects for the working class had been stifled by appeals for Party unity supplemented by the intervention of the political police. Meanwhile, in the upper echelons of the Party there was an increasingly byzantine but no less vicious struggle for control over the Party apparatus amongst Stalin, Trotsky and the other Old Bolshevik leaders. (At the beginning of 1926 it was Zinoviev's turn to be muzzled by Stalin's manoeuvres and the short-lived Joint Opposition led by Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky was in the process of formation.)

This sorry and unsavoury progression of the counter-revolution in Russia was echoed inside the Communist Inter-national where, from 1924, the policy of 'bolshevisation' of its constituent parties was a pseudonym for turning them into loyal and unquestioning clones of the Russian

Party. Along with Stalin's theorisation of 'socialism in one country', it was the means by which the Communist Left was effectively gagged. Moreover it closed off any discussion on what was happening in Russia itself within what was supposed to be the Executive body of the party of the international proletariat. The Communist International was being turned into the Comintern - a foreign policy arm of the Russian state.

We are taking the occasion of the seventieth anniversary to publish extracts from the interventions of Amadeo Bordiga, the spokesman for the Italian Communist Left, during the course of the meetings of the 6th Enlarged Executive of the Communist International held between 17th February and 15th March, 1926. During the various sessions Bordiga eloquently denounced the political degeneration of the International, focussing in turn on the tactics of the united front and workers' government, 'bolshevisation' and the hunting down of factions, as well as touching on the necessity for the Inter-national as a whole to discuss what was happening to the Russian Revolution.

However, he was never able to fully develop this last point in the open sessions — Stalin had already made sure of that. Only in a closed session between Stalin and the Italian delegates was he able to astonish Stalin when, after quizzing him about the relative situations of the Russian proletariat and the peasantry and the nature of the opposition groupings within the Communist Party, he directly asked whether "Comrade Stalin thinks the development of the Russian situation and the internal problems of the Russian Party are linked to the development of the international proletarian movement?" (Evoking the profound response from the Great Man: "Never till now has this question been put to me. I would never have believed that a communist could put it to me. May god forgive you for having done so.) There was to be no World Congress of the whole International in 1927 as Bordiga proposed in his summing up at the plenary session, Needless to say, when the 6th Comintern Congress was held (in 1928) neither was there any discussion of the Russian question.

As it was, however, Bordiga managed not only to put forward the positions of the Italian Left as they had just been propounded at the recent Congress of the Italian Party.<sup>[1]</sup> He also managed to broach the central issue of whither Russia. When it came to the "Theses on the Current questions of the International Communist Movement" Bordiga's voice — on behalf of the Italian Communist Left — was the only one raised in opposition.

Despite this courageous stand, on his return to Italy Bordiga virtually withdrew from political life. During the remainder of 1926 his only political text was a letter he wrote to Karl Korsch in October. Here he argued there was a "sense of reality" about the tactics of the current Trotsky-Zinoviev opposition in Russia and advised a cautious policy towards the Comintern, asserting that the Left "still needs to receive further blows before passing to the open offensive". In November he was arrested and confined on the island of Ustica before being incarcerated at Ponza until the end of 1929. In vain did the exiled Left Fraction (or Trotsky for that matter)

which had been formed in 1927 try to persuade him to join them abroad. "Wait and see" became his personal political stance as he distanced himself completely from political work both inside Italy and internationally. Thus, as Onorato Damen put it,

Subsequent political events, at times of historic importance, passed by this disdainful outsider without receiving any echo: The Trotsky/Stalin conflict; Stalinism; our Fraction which abroad - in France and Belgium — continued to develop the politics and ideology of the Livorno party; the civil war in Spain and the Second World War; and, finally Russia's line up on the imperialist war front. Not a word nor a line....

So it fell on the shoulders of others to draw up a balance sheet of the Russian experience and its worldwide counter-revolutionary aftermath. But that is another story. If his intervention at the Comintern in 1926 had been his sole political act he would have made a lasting contribution to the platform of the Communist Left.<sup>[2]</sup>

## **Bordiga's speech at the 5th session: 23rd February 1926**

We communists know very well that the historical development of the working class must lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat, but this is an action which must influence the broad masses, and these masses cannot be simply won by our ideological propaganda. To the full extent to which we can contribute to the formation of the masses' revolutionary consciousness, we shall do it by the strength of our position and our stance at each stage of the unfolding of events. This is why this stance cannot — and must not — be in contra-diction with our position concerning the final struggle, in other words the goal for which our party was specifically formed. Agitation around a slogan like that of workers' government,<sup>[3]</sup> for instance, can only sow disarray in the consciousness of the masses and even of the party and its general staff. We criticised all this from the beginning, so I shall content myself here with recalling in its broad outlines the judgement we expressed at the time.

When it was confronted by the errors which this tactic had provoked, and above all when the defeat of October 1923 occurred in Germany, the International recognised that it had been mistaken. It was not just a secondary accident, it was an error which cost us the hope of winning another great country beside the first in which the proletarian revolution had won — something which would have been of enormous importance for the world revolution.

Unfortunately, all that was said was: there is no question of radically revising the decisions of the 4th world congress, it is merely necessary to remove certain comrades who made mistakes in their application of the united front tactic, it is necessary to find those responsible. They were found in the right wing of the German party. Nobody was willing to acknowledge that it was the

International as a whole which bore the responsibility. Nevertheless, the theses were revised and a quite different formulation given to the workers' government.

Why did we not agree with the theses of the 5th congress? In our opinion, the revision was not sufficient, the new formulations should have been brought out more clearly. But above all we were opposed to the measures of the 5th congress because they did not eliminate the serious errors, because we thought it was not right to restrict the question to proceedings against individuals, and that a change was necessary in the International itself. But the majority refused to follow this healthy and courageous path. We have frequently criticised the fact that among us, in the milieu in which we work, a parliamentarist and diplomatist state of mind tends to develop. The theses are very left-wing, even those against whom they are directed approve them — thinking in that way to win immunity. But for our part, we looked beyond the words and foresaw what would happen after the 5th congress, that is why we could not declare ourselves satisfied.

## Bolshevisation

I would like here to establish the following: on more than one occasion, the comrades have been obliged to recognise the necessity of a radical change of line. The first time, the question of winning the masses had not been understood. The second time, it was the question of the united front tactic, and at the 3rd congress a complete revision was carried out of the line followed up to that time. But this is not all. At the 5th congress, and at the Enlarged Executive meeting of March 1925, it was once again perceived that everything was going badly. It was said: six years have passed since the foundation of the International, but none of its parties have succeeded in making the revolution. To be sure, the situation had deteriorated and we are now confronted by a certain stabilisation of capitalism. Nevertheless, it was explained that many things in the activity of the International would have to be changed. There was still no under-standing of what had to be done, so the slogan of Bolshevisation was launched. It is incomprehensible. What, eight years have gone by since the victory of the Russian bolsheviks, and we are now obliged to acknowledge that the other parties are not bolshevik? That a profound transformation is necessary in order to raise them to the level of bolshevik parties? Had nobody noticed this before?

Why did we not raise a protest against the slogan of bolshevisation at the time of the 5th congress? Because nobody could be opposed to the statement that other parties must attain the revolutionary capability which made the victory of the Bolshevik Party possible. But now it is not just a question of a mere slogan, a mere watchword. We are dealing with facts and an experience. Now it is necessary to draw up the balance-sheet of bolshevisation and see what it has consisted in. I maintain that this balance-sheet is negative, from several points of view.

There has been no resolution of the problem which had to be resolved. The method of bolshevisation applied to all parties has not secured their progress. I must examine the problem from various standpoints. First of all, from that of history.

We have only one party which has achieved victory — the Russian Bolshevik party. The essential thing, for us, is to follow the same path as that which the Russian party adopted to attain its victory, quite right, but that is not enough. It is undeniable that the historical route followed by the Russian party cannot display all the features of the historical development awaiting other parties. The Russian party — it is a fact — fought in specific conditions, in a country in which the feudal autocracy had not yet been overthrown by the capitalist bourgeoisie. Between the fall of the feudal autocracy and the conquest of power by the proletariat, too short a period intervened to be able to compare this development with that which the proletarian revolution will have to achieve in other countries.

There was not enough time for a bourgeois state apparatus to be constructed on the ruins of the Tsarist and feudal state apparatus. The course of events in Russia does not offer us the basic experience we need, in order to know how the proletariat is to overthrow the modern, liberal, parliamentary, capitalist state, which has existed for many years and possesses a great defensive capability.

Once these differences are stated, the fact that the Russian Revolution has confirmed our doctrine, our programme, and our conception of the role of the working class in the historical process, is theoretically all the more important insofar as the Russian Revolution - even in these specific conditions — accomplished the conquest of power, and the dictatorship of the proletariat realised through the communist party. The theory of revolutionary marxism found therein its most grandiose historical confirmation. From the ideological point of view, this is of decisive historical importance. But so far as tactics are concerned, it is not enough. It is indispensable for us to know how to attack the modern bourgeois state, which defends itself in armed struggle even more effectively than did the Tsarist autocracy, but which in addition defends itself with the help of ideological mobilisation and a defeatist education of the working class by the bourgeoisie. This problem does not appear in the history of the Russian Communist Party.

If 'bolshevisation' is understood to mean that one may expect to find a solution to all the strategic problems of revolutionary struggle in the revolution achieved by the Russian party, then this concept of bolshevisation is inadequate. The International must formulate a broader conception. It must find solutions to our strategic problems outside the Russian experience. The latter must be exploited to the full, none of its characteristic features must be neglected, it must be kept constantly in view, but we also need complementary elements deriving from the experience of the working class in the west. This is what must be said about bolshevisation from a historical point of view. The experience of tactics in Russia has not shown us how the struggle

against bourgeois democracy must be waged. It has given us no idea of the difficulties and tasks which the development of the proletarian struggle holds in store for us. ...

## Internal regime of the party and the International.

I shall now move on to another aspect of bolshevisation: the internal regime of the party and the CI. Here, a new discovery has been made: what all our sections lack is the iron discipline of the bolsheviks, as exemplified by the Russian party. An absolute ban is proclaimed on factions, and it is decreed that all party members are obliged to participate in common work, whatever their opinion may be. In this domain too, I think the question of bolshevisation has been posed in a very demagogic way.

If we put the question like this: does just anyone have the right to form a faction? — then every communist will answer — no! But the question cannot be put in this way. There are already results showing that the methods used have served neither the party nor the International. This question of internal discipline and factions must be approached from a marxist viewpoint, in a quite different and more complex way. We are asked: what do you want? Do you want the party to resemble a parliament, in which everyone has a democratic right to bid for power and strive to secure a majority? But this is the wrong way to pose the question. If it is posed like this, there is only one possible answer, of course, we would be against such a ridiculous regime.

It is true we must have an absolutely united communist party, excluding internal differences of opinion and disparate groupings. But this statement is not a dogma or a priori principle. Rather, it is a goal to be aimed at during the development of a genuine communist party. But this is only possible if all ideological, tactical and organisational questions are correctly posed and correctly resolved. Within the working class, it is the economic relations in which the various groups exist which determine the actions and initiatives of the class struggle. The political party has the role of gathering together and uniting whatever these actions have in common, from the point of view of the revolutionary goals of the working class of the world as a whole. Unity inside the party, the suppression of internal differences of opinion, the disappearance of factional struggles, will be a proof that the party is on the best path for carrying out its tasks correctly. But if differences of opinion do exist, this will prove that the party is marred by errors; that the party does not have the capacity to radically combat the degenerative tendencies of the working class movement, which normally manifest themselves at certain crucial moments in the general situation. If one is faced by cases of indiscipline, this is a symptom showing that this fault still exists in the party. Discipline, in fact, is a result, not a point of departure, not some kind of unshakeable platform. Moreover, this corresponds to the voluntary nature of entry into our

organisation. This is why a kind of party penal code cannot be a remedy for frequent episodes of lack of discipline.

In recent times, a regime of terror has been established in our parties, a kind of sport, which consists in intervening, punishing, annihilating — and all of this with a special pleasure, as if this were precisely the ideal of party life. The champions of this splendid operation even seem to be convinced that it constitutes a proof of revolutionary capacity and energy.

I think, on the contrary, that the true and good revolutionaries are generally those comrades who are the object of these extraordinary measures, and who bear them patiently in order not to destroy the party. I consider that this squandering of energy, this sport, this struggle within the party has nothing to do with the revolutionary work we should be carrying out. The day will come when we shall have to strike down and destroy capitalism, and in this domain the party will have to give evidence of its revolutionary energy. We do not want anarchy in the party, but neither do we want a regime of continuous reprisals, which is the very negation of party unity and cohesion.

For the moment, things are presented as follows: the central leadership will always exist and can do what it wants, for when taking measures against anybody who speaks against it, or 'annihilating' intrigue and opposition, it is always in the right. But merit does not lie in repressing rebellion, the important thing is for there to be no rebellion. Party unity is to be recognised by the results obtained, not by a regime of threats and terror. We need sanctions in our statutes, that is clear. But they must be exceptions, not a normal and general procedure inside the party. If some elements flagrantly abandon the common path, measures must be taken against them. But if recourse to a code of sanctions becomes the rule in a society, that means the society is not exactly perfect. Sanctions must only be used exceptionally, they must not constitute a rule, a sport, or the leadership's ideal. If we wish to form a solid bloc, in the true sense of the term, this must all change.

The theses proposed here contain a few fine phrases in this respect. A little more freedom is conceded. But perhaps this comes somewhat late.

Possibly, it is thought safe to give a little more freedom to people who have been 'crushed' and can no longer stir hand or foot. But let us move away from the theses and consider the facts. It has always been said that our parties should be built on the principle of democratic centralism. It would perhaps be no bad thing if we could find another expression instead of democracy - but the formula was provided by Lenin. How is democratic centralism to be achieved? Well, of course, through the eligibility of all leading comrades and consultation of the mass of the party on certain key questions.

Obviously, there may be exceptions to this rule in a revolutionary party. It is permissible for the leadership on occasion to say: comrades, the party would normally be consulting you, but

since the struggle against our enemies has just entered a dangerous period and there is not a minute to lose, we are acting without consulting you.

But what is dangerous is to give the impression of a consultation, when what is really involved is an initiative taken from above. That is to abuse the leadership's control of the party apparatus and press. In Italy, we said that we accept dictatorship, but detest such 'Giolittian' methods. For is bourgeois democracy anything but a method of trickery? And can this be the kind of democracy you are granting us within the party? Can this be what you are striving to achieve? Then we say that a dictatorship would be better, which at least does not mask itself hypocritically. What must be introduced is a genuine form of democracy, in other words, one which allows the leadership to take advantage of the party apparatus only for good ends.

Otherwise, there cannot fail to be malaise and dissatisfaction, especially amongst the working class. We must have a healthy regime in the party. It is absolutely indispensable that the party should have the possibility of forming an opinion and expressing it openly. ...

The birth of a faction shows that something is wrong. To remedy the ill, it is necessary to seek out the historical causes which gave birth to the anomaly, and which determined the formulation or tendency to form the faction in question. The causes lie in the ideological and political errors of the party. The factions are not the sickness, but merely the symptom, and if one wishes to treat the sick organism, one must not combat the symptoms but try to discover the causes of the sickness. Besides, in most cases what was involved was groups of comrades who were making no attempt to create an organisation or anything of the kind. What was involved were currents of opinion, tendencies, which sought to express themselves in the normal, regular and collective activity of the party. The method of faction-hunting, scandal campaigns, police surveillance and mistrust of comrades — methods which, in reality, represents the worst factionalism developing in the higher levels of the party — can only result in worsening the situation of our movement and pushing all objective criticism onto the path of factionalism. Such methods cannot ensure the inner unity of the party, they only paralyse it and render it impotent. A radical transformation of such methods of work is absolutely indispensable.

If we do not put an end to all this, the consequences will be very serious. ...

The intervention of the International centre in the affairs of national sections has thus in several cases been less than fortunate. I blame the International's methods of work for this, its relations with the national sections and its way of forming their leading bodies. I already criticised our methods of work at the last congress. There is no genuine collective collaboration in our leading bodies and congresses. The International centre appears quite alien to our sections, managing discussion within them and choosing in each a faction to support.

This centre is backed on every question by all the other sections, who hope in this way to assure themselves of better treatment when their own turn comes. The various leadership



groupings are formed on the basis of such 'horsedealing'. People tell us: the international leadership derives from the hegemony of the Russian party, which is justified by the fact that it made the revolution and harbours the International's headquarters. That is why it is necessary to accord especial importance to decisions prompted by the Russian party, which is our leader. But then the problem arises of how the Russian party resolves international questions. This is a question we have every right to pose.

Since the most recent events, since the last discussion, this fulcrum of the whole system is no longer sufficiently stable. In the latest discussion in the Russian party, we have seen comrades who claim to have an identical knowledge of Leninism, and who unquestionably have an identical right to speak in the name of the Bolshevik revolutionary tradition, each using quotations from Lenin against the other in argument and each interpreting Russian experience in his own favour. Without going into the substance of the discussion, it is just this undeniable fact which I want to establish here. Who, in this situation, will decide in the last instance on international problems. One can no longer answer: the bolshevik Old Guard, for this reply leads in practice to conflicting solutions. Thus the fulcrum of the entire system resists objective investigation.

But this means it is clearly necessary to seek a different solution. We may compare our international organisation to a pyramid. This pyramid must have an apex and sides which mount towards that apex. This is how we may represent our unity and necessary centralisation. But today, as a result of our tactics, the pyramid is standing dangerously on its apex.

It must therefore be reversed and stood back on its base, so that it is stable again. Hence, our conclusion on the question of bolshevisation is that we must not be satisfied with mere modifications of a secondary nature, but the whole system must be modified from top to bottom. The left government ... What are our tasks for the future? This assembly cannot concern itself seriously with this problem without confronting, in its full dimensions and all its gravity, the fundamental question of the historical relations between Soviet Russia and the capitalist world. Alongside the problem of the revolutionary strategy of the proletariat, the problem of the international peasant movement, and the problem of colonial and oppressed peoples, the question of the Russian Communist Party's state policy is today the most important of all for us. The Russian party must assess the interplay of class relations inside Russia, take the necessary steps to check the influence of the peasants and the burgeoning petty bourgeois strata, and defend itself from external pressures including of a military kind. Since a revolutionary overturn has not yet occurred in other countries, it is necessary to coordinate policy in Russia as closely as possible with the overall revolutionary policy of the proletariat.

I do not intend to go fully into this question here, but I maintain that in this struggle, yes, we must certainly base ourselves first and foremost upon the Russian working class and its communist party, but it is of fundamental importance that we also base ourselves upon the

proletariat of the capitalist states, whose class sense is determined by direct contiguity with its capitalist adversary. The problem of Russian policy cannot be resolved within the narrow limits of the Russian movement alone, the direct collaboration of the whole CI is absolutely essential. Without such collaboration, not only revolutionary strategy in Russia, but also our policies in the capitalist states will be seriously threatened. A tendency may emerge to water down the character and role of the communist parties. We are already in fact under attack in this sense, not from within our own ranks, but from social democrat and opportunist circles. Related to this is the question of our campaign for international trade union unity and our attitude to the 2nd International. We are all agreed here that the communist parties must unconditionally maintain their revolutionary independence. All the same, it is necessary to warn of the possible emergence of a tendency to replace communist parties with organisms of a less explicit kind, which would not have strict class aims but be politically more neutral. In the present situation, it is our unquestionable duty to defend the international and communist character of our party organisation against any liquidationist tendency.

After the criticisms we have made, can we consider the International, such as it exists today, adequately armed for this double task - of working out a correct strategy both for Russia and for the other countries? Can we demand, for instance, immediate discussion of all Russian problems by this assembly? To this question we must, alas, reply in the negative. It is absolutely essential to carry out a serious revision of the internal regime of our parties, and to include on their immediate agenda the problems of tactics on a world scale and state policy in the USSR. But tackling these questions requires a new course, with completely different methods. In the report and the theses which have been proposed, we find no adequate basis for resolving these matters. What we need is not official optimism. We have to understand that it is not little correctives — of the kind we have more than once seen introduced into the internal regimes of our parties — which can equip us to carry out the grandiose tasks which confront the general staff of the world revolution.

Speech to the 9th session, 25th February ... I am finishing, comrades. As regards our internal regime and reversing the 'pyramid', and on the question of factions, I cannot reply here to what comrade Bukharin said. But I ask the following, will there be a change in future in our internal relations? Does this session of the plenum show that a new path is being taken? At the very moment when we are being assured here that internal terror will be halted, we hear statements from the French and Italian delegates which fill us with doubt. We shall wait to see you at work.

I think, for my part, that the hunt for so-called factionalism will continue, and will produce the same results as it has up to now. We can see this from the method adopted to settle the German question and others. I must say that, in my view, this method of personal humiliation is a deplorable one, even when it is utilised against political elements who have to be combatted vigorously. I do not consider it to be revolutionary, and I think that the majority which today proves its orthodoxy by scoffing at persecuted and broken sinners may very well be made up of

former disgraced opportunists. We know that these methods have been applied - and will be again — to comrades who not only have a revolutionary past, but remain precious elements for our future struggles. This mania for self-destruction must cease, if we truly aspire to the leadership of the proletariat's revolutionary struggle.

That is why the spectacle of this session of the plenum has filled me with dark forebodings, so far as the impending changes within the International are concerned. I shall, therefore, vote against the draft resolution which has been presented.

Motion proposed at the 20th session I wish to put my position on the discussion of Russian matters in written form. It is legitimate to note that this plenum has not discussed Russian questions, and has neither the possibility nor the requisite preparation to do so. This gives me every right to conclude that this is one result of the International's incorrect general policy, with its rightist deviations.

This is exactly what I observed in my first speech, during the general political discussion.

Concretely, I propose that the World Congress should be convened next summer, and that its agenda should be precisely the question of relations between, on the one hand, the revolutionary struggle of the world proletariat and, on the other, the policy of the Russian state and the Soviet Communist Party. It goes without saying that the discussion of these problems must be properly prepared, in all sections of the International.

(The above motion was unanimously referred to the Praesidium).

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## Footnotes.

1. This had been held in the French town of Lyons in January. The Lyons Theses of the Left had been rejected by the Italian Party leadership of Togliatti and Gramsci, now thoroughly 'bolshevised' in its political positions and method of work.

2. Our introduction is partly drawn from the work of the PCInt. whose collection of documents and extracts from previous texts, entitled *Per una analisi critica del tardo bordighismo e dei suoi epigoni*, we recommend to anyone who is able to read Italian.

3. For more on the Italian Left's attitude to the workers' government slogan (and their general political framework) see The Rome Theses which were adopted by the CPd'I in 1922 and reprinted in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 22 (Series 2).

4. The implications of bolshevisation for the Italian Party and the response of the Left is dealt with in the CWO's pamphlet, *Platform of the Committee of Intesa, 1925*. The Platform is also available in Italian in Onorato Damen, *Gramsci tra Marxismo e Idealismo*, available from the PCInt.'s address.

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Amadeo Bordiga 1926

# Letter to Karl Korsch

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**Naples, 28. Octobre 1926**

Dear Comrade Korsch

The problems we face today are so important that we should really be discussing them face to face in detail. This unfortunately is not a possibility at the moment. Also I won't be covering all the points in your platform in this letter, some of which could give rise to useful discussions between us.

For example I don't think "the way you express yourself" about Russia is correct. We can't say that "the Russian revolution was a bourgeois revolution". The 1917 revolution was a proletarian revolution, even if generalising about the "tactical" lessons which can be derived from it is a mistake. The problem we are presented with now is this: What will become of the proletarian dictatorship in one country if revolutions don't follow elsewhere. There may be a counterrevolution, there may be an external intervention, or there may be a degenerative process in which case it would be a matter of uncovering the symptoms and reflexes within the communist party.

We can't simply say that Russia is a country where capitalism is expanding. The matter is much more complex; it is a question of new forms of class struggle, which have no historical precedents; it is a question of showing how the entire conception of the relations with the middle classes supported by the Stalinists is a renunciation of the communist programme. It would appear that you rule out the possibility of the Russian Communist Party engaging in any other politics than that which equates with the restoration of capitalism. This is tantamount to a justification of Stalin, or to support for the inadmissible politics of "giving up power". Rather it is necessary to say that a correct and classist policy for Russia would have been possible if the whole of the "Leninist old guard" hadn't made a series of serious mistakes in international policy.

And then I have the impression - I restrict myself to vague impressions - that in your tactical

formulations, even when they are acceptable, you place too much value on influences arising from the objective circumstances which may today appear to have swung to the left. You are aware that we, the Italian lefts, are accused of not taking the situation into account: this is not true. And yet we do aim to construct a **left line** which is truly of a general, rather than of an occasional, application; one which remains intact during the various phases and developments of situations into the distant future.

I'm of course approaching the subject of your **tactics**. Whilst aiming to express myself in precise terms rather than with ... official formulas, I would say that they still seem to me, as regards the party's international relations, too elastic and too ... bolshevik. All the reasoning with which you justify your attitude toward the Fischer group, that is that you counted on pushing it to the left, or if it refused, to devalue it in the eyes of the workers, leaves me unconvinced, and it seems to me that de facto good results have not come of it. In general I think that the priority today is not so much in the realm of organisation and manoeuvres, but in the elaboration of a political ideology; one which is left-wing and international and based on the revealing experiences undergone by the Comintern. Weakness in this respect will mean that any international initiative will be very difficult.

I am also enclosing some notes regarding our position on questions pertaining to the Russian left. It is interesting that we see things differently: you who used to be highly suspicious of Trotsky have immediately subscribed to the programme of unconditional solidarity with the Russian opposition, betting on Trotsky rather than on Zinoviev (a preference I share).

Now that the Russian opposition has had to "submit", you talk of us having to make a declaration attacking it for having lowered the flag, something I wouldn't agree to do since we didn't believe in the first place that we should "merge" under the international flag unfurled by the Russian opposition.

Zinoviev and Trotsky are eminently realistic men, they understand that they will have to take a lot of punches before passing openly onto the offensive. We haven't yet arrived at the moment of definitive clarification, neither about the situation inside Russia or about its foreign policy.

1. We share the Russian left's positions on the state political directives of the Russian communist party. We don't agree with the direction taken by the Central Committee, which has been backed by a majority within it. It will lead to the degeneration of the Russian party and the proletarian dictatorship, and away from the programme of revolutionary Marxism and Leninism. In the past we didn't contest the Russian communist party's state policy as long as it remained on terrain corresponding to the two documents, Lenin's speech on the Tax in Kind and Trotsky's report to the 4th World Congress. We agree with Lenin's theses at the 2nd Congress.

2. The Russian Left's stance on the Comintern's tactics and politics, leaving aside the question of the past responsibility of many of its members, is inadequate. It is far removed from what we

have been saying since the formation of the Communist International on the relationship between parties and masses, tactics and situation, between communist parties and other parties which allegedly represent the workers, on the evaluation of the alternating trends in bourgeois politics. They are closer to us, but not completely, on the question of the International's method of working and on the interpretation and functioning of international discipline and fractionism. Trotsky's positions on the German question of 1923 are satisfactory, as is his appraisal of the present world situation. The same cannot be said of the rectification made by Zinoviev on the questions of the united front and the International Red Union, or on other points, which have occasional and contingent value and place no trust in a tactic that avoids past error.

3. Given the politics of pressure and provocation from the leaders of the International and from its sections, any organisation of national and international groups, which are against the rightist deviation, involves the perils of secessionism. We needn't aspire to a splitting of the parties and the International. Before a split is possible, we need to allow the experience of an artificial and mechanical discipline, with the resulting absurd practices, to run their course, never renouncing however our political and ideological positions or expressing solidarity with the prevailing line. The groups which subscribe to a completely traditional left ideology aren't able to solidarise unconditionally with the Russian opposition but neither can they condemn its recent submission; which didn't indicate a reconciliation but rather conditions under which the only other alternative would have been a split. The objective situation both in Russia and elsewhere is such that to be hounded out of the Comintern would mean having still less chance of modifying the course of the working-class struggle than by being inside the part.

4. A solidarity and community of political declarations would not in any case be admissible with elements like Fischer and co. who, in other parties as well as the German one, have had recent involvement within party leaderships of the right and centre, and whose passage to the opposition coincided with the impossibility of preserving a party leadership in agreement with the international centre, and with criticisms made by the International of their work. This would be incompatible with the task of defending the new method and course of international communist work, which has to succeed to that of parliamentary-bureaucratic type manoeuvring.

5. All means which don't exclude the right to remain in the party must be used to denounce the prevailing trend as one leading to opportunism and in contrast with faithfulness to the programmatic principles of the International, principles which other groups apart from ourselves also have the right to defend provided they set themselves the problem of seeking out the initial deficiencies - not theoretical, but tactical, organisational and disciplinary ones which have rendered the Third International still more susceptible to degenerative dangers[...]

I will try and send you items on Italian matters. We haven't accepted the declaration of war, which consists in the suspension of some leading left-wingers; the matter hasn't led to measures of a fractionist character. The batteries of discipline have fired into the wadding so far. It isn't a

very satisfactory line and we aren't happy about it, but it is the least bad option possible. I'll send you a copy of our speech to the International.

In conclusion. I don't go along your view that we should make an international declaration and neither do I believe it to be a practical possibility. What I do believe on the other hand is that it would be useful to issue in various countries declarations which have an ideological and politically parallel content regarding the Russia and Comintern questions, without though going to the extreme lengths of offering up a fractionist "conspiracy", with each fraction freely elaborating their own thoughts and experiences.

As regards this internal question, I subscribe to the tactic that more often than not it is best to let matters take their course, which certainly as regards "foreign" affairs is very dangerous and opportunistic. I believe this to be the case especially with regard to the extraordinary play of the mechanism of internal power and the mechanical discipline which I persist in believing is destined to break down of its own accord. I'm aware this is inadequate and not very clear. I hope you'll excuse me and in any case I extend to you my cordial greetings.

*A. Bordiga*

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Amadeo Bordiga 1946

# The Fundamentals for a Marxist Orientation

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## The Fundamentals for a Marxist Orientation

1. Marxism is not a matter of choice between conflicting opinions, in the sense that Marxism is connected with a historic tradition.
2. Orientation of the dialectic method of Marxism; the contradiction between the productive forces and social forms; classes, class struggle, party-conformism, reformism, anti-formism.
3. Interpretation of the characteristics of the present historic period, dialectic evolution of historic forms.  
Political example: monarchy and republic.  
Economic example: mercantilism.  
Social example: the family.  
Ideological example: Christian religion.
4. The Capitalist cycle: revolutionary phase, evolutionary and democratic phase, fascist and imperialist phase.
5. Proletarian strategy in the democratic-pacifist stage: Proletarian tactics in the phase of Imperialism, and of fascism.
6. The Russian Revolution: errors and deviations of the Third International; retrogression of the proletarian regime in Russia.
7. Present status of the problem of proletarian strategy; historic rejection of all support to liberal-democratic demands; negative solution to the argument for support of forces which lead

capitalism into its most modern phase, monopolist on the economic plane, totalitarian in the political domain.

Before convincing anybody, it is necessary that they understand well the positions which we present. Persuasion, propaganda, proselytising comes later.

According to our conceptions, these opinions are not the result of the work of prophets, apostles, or of thinkers who hold that the brain gives birth to new truths, permitting of many followers.

The process is the opposite. It is the objective, impersonal work of a social vanguard which concentrates on and makes clear the theoretical positions which their common conditions of life bring them to as individuals, well before consciousness of them.

The method of Marxism is therefore anti-scholastic, anti-cultural, anti-revelation (illuminist). In the existing theoretical vacuum, reflecting the practical disorganisation, one must not be astonished, nor complain if the presentation of our position results at first in alienation instead of drawing closer, of a possible adherent.

Every political movement which presents its programme, claims for itself historical precedent, tradition, either recent or in the distant past, national or international.

The movement of which this magazine claims for itself are well, clearly defined origins. But as against the other movements, it did not originate from a revealed word (revelation), or from super-human beginnings. It does not recognise the authority of unchangeable texts, nor as points of reference, each question of legal rules, nor in any manner whatsoever recognise anything innate or inborn in the thoughts and senses of man.

This orientation can only be traced in terms of Marxism: Socialism, Communism, the political movement of the working class. It is a pity that these terms are abused. In 1917, Lenin considered it a fundamental question to change the name of the party, returning to the name "Communist" from the "Communist Manifesto" of 1848. Today, the great abuse of the name, "Communist", by the parties which are far outside of any revolutionary class line, still creates immense confusion; movements that openly preserve bourgeois institutions, daring to say that they still are proletarian parties, like those of the Spanish anti-Franco parties.

## Historic tradition

The historic line of which we claim to be part is the following:

The Communist Manifesto of 1848, the fundamental works of Marx and Engels, which in

classic fashion, restored revolutionary marxism against the revisionists-opportunists, which accompanied the revolutionary victory in Russia, 1917; the fundamental works of Lenin: the declaration which established the Third International and up to the First and Second Congress; the positions held by the Left in the succeeding Congresses, presented from 1922 on.

Limited to Italy this historic line is connected with the Left current of the Socialist Party during the war of 1914-1918; with the founding of the Communist Party of Italy at Leghorn in January 1921, with its Congress of Rome in 1922, with the activity of its left-wing dominant until the Congress in 1926; since then organising outside of the “Communist” Party of the Comintern; alien to it.

This line does not coincide with the line of the Trotskyist movement of the Fourth International. Trotsky revolted late, and Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, and the other Russian groups of the Bolshevik tradition still later, against the wrong tactics supported up to 1924, finally recognising the deviation, aggravated up to the overthrow of the fundamental political principles of the movement. Today the Trotskyists claim to have restored these principles, but their tactic of false manoeuvring, and of their liquidationist line, is falsely defined as Bolshevik and Leninist.

## Method

The basins of all investigation must be a consideration of the historic process as a whole; its development till now, and an objective examination of present social phenomena.

This method has been well stated often, but frequently as misleading in regard to its application. The fundamentals of the investigation of the material means by which human groupings satisfy their needs, that is, by an examination of productive technique, and in connection with the development of which, economic relations arise. In the course of different epochs, these factors determine the superstructure composed of the legal institutions; political, military and the dominant ideologies.

The contradiction between the productive forces and the social forms manifests itself as a struggle between the classes who have antagonistic economic interests. In the final stages, this struggle becomes the armed struggle for the conquest of political power.

This method is denoted by the following expressions: historic materialism, dialectical materialism, economic determinism, scientific materialism and the communist critique.

The important thing is always to apply the results to the facts and not to a priori postulates, to clarify and explain human phenomena; not to myths or divinities; not to principles of “right” or natural “ethics”, such as Justice, Equality, Fraternity and other abstractions similar to them

devoid of any sense. Most important, one must not capitulate to the pressure of the dominant ideology, or take refuge in illusory postulates, without a clear perception or without acknowledging it, when action intervenes anew, just at the most burning moments and at the instant of decisive conclusions. The dialectic method is the only one which overcomes the current contradiction between continuity and rigorous theoretical coherence on one hand, and on the other hand, the capacity to face critically old established conclusions in formal terms.

Its acceptance hasn't got the character of a faith, or a fanaticism of school or party.

The productive forces which consist in the main of the men adapted to production, in their groupings and in addition, the tools and mechanical means that are used, operate within the framework of forms of production.

We understand by forms, the disposition, and the relationships of interdependence within which is developed productive and social activity. We understand these forms to be all the established hierarchies (family, military, theocracy, politics). The state is all of these: the prerogatives and the tribunals connected with them; all the rules and dispositions of an economic and legal character which resist all transgression. Society assumes a given type as long as the productive forces maintain themselves within the framework of its forms of production. At a given moment in history, this equilibrium tends to be broken. From diverse causes, among them the progress of technique, the growth of population, expanding communication, increasing the productive forces. Those in contradiction with traditional forms, tending to break this framework in pieces, and when successful, one finds oneself in the presence of a revolution: the community organises itself into new economic, social and legal relationships. New forms take the place of old.

The dialectic method discovers, applies, and confirms its solutions on the grand scale of collective phenomena, and in a scientific and experimental manner, (methods that the thinkers of the bourgeois epoch applied to the natural world in the course of an ideological struggle which was the reflection of the revolutionary social struggle of their class against the theocratic and absolutist regimes, but which they were unable to extend into the social domain). They drew some conclusions acquired on this plane concerning the solutions of the problem of individual conduct, in opposition to the method employed by the schools of their religious, legal, philosophic and economic adversaries.

These held the standards of collective conduct on the inconsistent basis of the myth of the individual, held that being is individual spirit, mind, soul, and immortal, existing as juridical and civil subjects, existing as unchangeable units of economic policy, etc... Science has endeavoured to go beyond the many hypotheses on the material indivisible individual, to the study of atoms and to reduce them to irreducible units; it has defined complex points of meeting of lines of force radiating from the external field of energy; thus today one can say the cosmos is not the

function of units, but that every unit is the function of the cosmos.

Those who believe in the individual and speak of personality, dignity, liberty, of the duties of a citizen, do not employ marxist thinking. That which moves man is not opinions, or beliefs or faiths, nor any phenomena whatsoever of so-called thought, which inspires their will or action. They are moved to act by their needs which are the interests arising from the same material necessities beckoning groups all over simultaneously. They collide with the limitations imposed by the surrounding social structure opposed to the satisfaction of these needs. They react individually and collectively in a sense which for the general average is determined in advance of the play of stimuli and reactions that give birth in the brain to sentiments, thoughts and judgements.

This phenomena is naturally of great complexity and perhaps in some cases are the reverse of the general law that is verified, however. But that as it may, whoever holds that individual consciousness, moral principles, opinions and decisions of the individual or the citizen, intervenes as moving cause in place of social and historic facts, has no right to be called a Marxist.

The contradiction between the productive forces and the social forms is manifested as a struggle between classes who have antagonistic economic interests. In the final stages, this struggle becomes the armed struggle for the conquest of power.

## **Class, struggle of classes, party**

From the Marxist point of view, the class is not a concealed statistical data, but an organic active force, and it manifests itself when the simple convergence of economic conditions and interests widens into action and common struggle.

In these situations the movement is guided by the regroupments and organs of the vanguard, of which the modern form evolved is the class political party. The collectivity, from which the action culminates in the action of a party, operates in history with an efficiency and a real dynamic unable to be attained on the limited scale of individual action. It is the party which arrives at a theoretical consciousness of the development of events, and as a result, an influence on their future, in the sense determined by the productive forces and by the relations of factors determining them.

One cannot clarify principles and directives without simplification, in spite of the great difficulty and complexity of problems. With this in mind, we recognise therefore three types of political movements which include all the characteristics.

Conformist: the movements which struggle to preserve the forms and institutions in power by

prohibiting all change, claiming immutable principles. They are of a religious, philosophic and legal character.

Reformist: the movements which, in not desiring the sharp and violent overthrow of traditional institutions, profit from the very strong pressure of the productive forces on them and sanctions gradual and partial changes of the existing order.

Revolutionary: (we adopt the provisional term anti-formists); the movements which demand and put into practice the attack on the old forms, and which even before knowing how to theorise about the character of the new regime, tend to break from the old, provoking the irresistible birth of new forms.

## Conformism, reformism, antiformism

All schematisation presents the danger of errors. One might ask himself if the marxist dialectic is unable likewise to construct or contrive a general picture of historic events, in reducing their whole development to a series in the domination of classes, which are born revolutionary, become reformist and end up conservative. The advent of the classless society with the revolutionary victory of the proletariat poses a term suggestive of this development (that which Marx called “the end of human pre-history”).

But this term appears to be a metaphysical construction, like those false philosophies of the past. Hegel (as the epoch of Marx already proved) reduced his dialectic system to an absolute construction, falling, unconsciously, into a metaphysic that overshadowed the destructive part of his critique (i.e. philosophy reflecting the revolutionary struggle of the bourgeoisie). From this fact, Hegel continuing the classic philosophy of German idealism and of bourgeois thought, stated the absurd thesis that the history of action and thought must finally crystallise itself into a perfect system, in the conquest of the Absolute. The Marxist dialectic eliminates such a static conclusion.

Engels, in his classic exposition of scientific socialism, (as a theory opposed to Utopianism, which placed reliance on social reform through propaganda for the adoption of projects by the more comfortable classes of society, by a writer or a sect) seems perhaps to admit of a general rule or law of historic movement when he uses the expressions such as “progress forward”, “world progress”. These vigorous formulas of propaganda should not make one believe he has discovered a recipe in which is enclosed the infinite world of possible evolution of human society, a formula which is a substitute for the habitual bourgeois abstractions of evolution, civilisation, progress, etc.

The marvellous advantage of the dialectic method of investigation is essentially revolutionary.

It manifests itself by the implacable destruction of innumerable theoretical systems which time after time, reveal the domination of privileged classes. For this cemetery of broken idols we must substitute, not a new myth, not a new sentiment, not a new credo, but the realistic expression of conditions of fact and of the most likely development that can be foreseen.

For example, the correct marxist formulation is not, “one day the proletariat will take political power and destroy the system of capitalist society and construct the communist economy”; but the opposite: only by its organisation as a class, and therefore in a political party, and the armed installation of its dictatorship, will the proletariat be able to destroy the power of the capitalist economy and render possible a non-capitalist, non-commercial economy. From the scientific point of view, one cannot exclude a different end to capitalism, such as a return to barbarism; a world catastrophe caused by armies at war having the character, for example, of a pathological degeneration of the human race. (The blind and those condemned to the disintegration of radioactive tissue, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki are a warning of other forms of destruction that cannot be foreseen at present).

The revolutionary Communist movement of this period of convulsions, must be characterised not only by the theoretical destruction of all conformism and reformism of the present world, but also by its practical positions. Its tactics can have no common road with any movement whatsoever, conformist or reformist, in no sector, nor for any period of time. It must be based above all, on the historically acquired knowledge that capitalism has exhausted its initial anti-formism, that is to say, it is not its task any longer to destroy pre-capitalist forms, and of resistance to the restoration of these pre-capitalist forms.

This is not to deny that as long as powerful forces developed capitalism, there was an accelerated, unprecedented rhythm in the transformation of the world economy. Under these conditions the proletarian class was able and did, in a dialectic manner condemn it from a doctrinal viewpoint and supported it in action.

An essential difference between the metaphysical method and the dialectical method resides precisely in that.

A given type of institution, political and social organisation is not good or bad in itself, to accept or reject, after examining its characteristics according to general principles or rules.

In following the dialectical interpretation of history one finds that each institution has had successively, a role and influence, at first revolutionary, then progressive, and finally conservative.

## **The dialectical evolution of historical**

## forms

The question is, to put in its proper relationship each aspect of the problem, the productive forces and the social factors:

### A

It is a metaphysical position which declares in principle: Authority or liberty, royalist or republican, aristocrat or democrat, and refers in polemic to rules placed outside of the historic context. Plato had already in his first tentative system of political science, gone beyond the mystical absolutism of principles, and Aristotle followed it in distinguishing three types — the power of one, — the few, -the many, — the good forms and the bad: monarchy and tyranny — aristocracy and oligarchy — democracy and demagoguery.

The modern analysis since Marx, goes much further. In the present historic phase, nearly all political formulas of propaganda use the worst traditional motifs of superstitious religions, legal forms, and philosophies of all sorts.

It is necessary to oppose this chaos of ideas — the reflection of the chaos of relations of interests of a society in decay.

In order to introduce this analysis, it is necessary to proceed to an analogous evaluation of the well-known relationships of preceding historic epochs.

### B

Beginning with the economic forms, it is in no sense necessary to declare oneself a partisan in general of communist or private economy, liberal or monopolist, individual or collective, nor praise the merits of each system according to the general well-being: in following that method one falls into Utopianism, which is the exact opposite of the Marxist dialectic.

The classic example of Engels on Communism as the “negation of the negation” is well known. The first forms of human production were Communist. Private property next appeared; a system much more complex and efficient. From this, human society returns to Communism. This modern communism would be unrealisable, if primitive communism had not been superseded, conquered and destroyed by the system of private property. The marxist considers as an advantage, this initial transformation. What we say of communism applies as well to all other economic forms such as slavery, serfdom, manufacturing capitalism, industrial capitalism, and thus consequently.



The petty-trading (mercantile) economy, in which objects satisfying human needs cease to be directly acquired and consumed by the primitive producer, which is the end of barbarism, becoming objects of exchange, through barter at first, with money developing as a means of exchange later, represented a great social revolution.

It made possible the adaptation of different individuals to diverse productive work (division of labour), enlarging and differentiating enormously the character of social life. One can recognise at the same time the changes from one stage to the other in stating that after a series of types of economic organisation, based on the common principle of mercantilism (slavery, feudalism, capitalism) the trend today is to a non-mercantile economy, rejecting the thesis that production is impossible without monetary exchange of merchandise as a conformist and reactionary principle.

The abolition of mercantilism can succeed today, and only today because of the fact of collective labour and the concentration of productive forces. Capitalism, last of the mercantile economies, in realising this development and concentration, makes possible the breaking of the bonds within which all use-values circulate as merchandise and in which human work itself is treated as such.

A century before this stage, a critique of the mercantile system, based on the general reasoning at the base of its philosophy, legal or moral code would have been sheer folly.

## C

The various types of social systems which have successively appeared and lived out their collective life, differentiating themselves from primitive individualism, going through an immense cycle, the relations within which the individual life and movement becomes more and more complex, cannot be individually judged as favourable or unfavourable. They must be considered in relation to their historic development which comprises a variable role in the diverse transformations and revolutions.

Each of these institutions surges up as a revolutionary conquest, develops and reforms in the long historic cycles, becoming finally a reactionary obstacle and conformist.

The institution of the family appears as the first social form at the time in the human species when the bond between parents and offspring prolongs itself well beyond the period that is physiologically necessary.

The first form of authority as then born, exercised by the mother, afterwards by the father over their descendants, even when they are physically developed and vigorous. At that stage we are therefore in the presence of a revolution since there appeared the first possibility of a

collectively organised life which constitutes the base of development which leads ultimately to the first form of organised society and the State.

The new social system of a more vast nature, contains and disciplines the institution of the family, as in the first cities, states, and aristocratic regimes, afterwards in the bourgeois regime. All are based on the institution of inherited taboos (conventions).

There then appears the necessity of an economy which supersedes the play of individual interests. The institution of the family, with its too narrow limits, becomes an obstacle and a reactionary element in society.

Without denying its historic role, the modern communists, after observing that the capitalist system has already deformed and dissolved the sanctity of the family institution, fights it openly and proposes to supplant it.

The different forms of the State, monarchy and republic alternate in the Course of history, in a complex manner and are represented in one or the other historic situations as revolutionary, progressive or conservative.

It can be admitted that before it disappears, capitalism attains the liquidation of dynastic regimes which today are few in number. But, on this question, one must not proceed to absolute judgements situated outside of time and space.

The first monarchies appeared as the political expression of the division of material tasks; such elements as the family unit, or the primitive tribe were assigned to defence or pillage, by armed attack against other groups and peoples. The others turned to the hunt, to fishing, to agriculture or the first beginnings of artisanship. The first warriors and kings attained therefore, the privilege of power at major risk. Yet social forms still appear there of a most developed and complex nature, previously impossible, representing the road toward a revolution in social relationships.

To successive epochs, the institution of monarchy made possible the establishment and development of vast national state organisations against the federations of principalities and small nobility. It had an innovating and reforming function. Dante is the monarchical reformist at the beginning of Modern Times.

More recently, the monarchy and republic has assumed in the wealthier countries a stricter form of power of the bourgeoisie.

It used to be possible for republican parties and movements, of a revolutionary, reformist, and conservative character to exist side by side.

As for the rest, some accessible and simplified examples were the revolutionary Brutus who

hunted Tarquin; the reformist Gracchi who looked to give to the aristocratic republic a content conforming to the interests of the plebeians: the reactionary and conformist traditional republicans such as Cato and Cicero, who struggled against the grandiose historic evolution represented by the expansion of the Roman Empire with its legal and social forms, in the antique world.

Among modern examples it suffices to point out as respectively antiformist, reformist and conformist, the three republics of France; 1793, 1848, and 1871.

## D

The crises arising in the economic forms are reflected not only in political and social institutions, but also in religious beliefs and philosophic opinions.

It is in relation to historic situations and social crisis that one must consider the legal norms, religious positions, or philosophies, since each appear successively under the revolutionary banner, reformist banner, or conformist banner.

The movement which bears the name of Christ was antiformist and revolutionary. To state that in every man there exists a soul of divine origin and destined to immortality, whatever his social position or caste, was equivalent to rise up in revolution against the oppressive forms, and the slavery, of the Orient. As long as the law permitted the human person to be an object of transactions; to be merchandise like an animal; to state the equality of believers meant a slogan of struggle which came up against the implacable resistance of the theocratic organisation of judges, aristocrats, and military, in the state of antiquity.

After long historic phases and the abolition of slavery, Christianity became official religion and pillar of the State.

We recognise its reformist cycle in the Europe of modern times in struggling against the excessive connection of the Church with layers of the most privileged and most oppressive.

Today there is no ideology more conformist than Christianity, which already in the period of the French revolution, made its doctrine and organisation the arms for the most powerful resistance by the old regimes.

Today the powerful network of the Church and religious confession on every hand reconciles and is officially in accord with the Capitalist Regime. It is employed as a fundamental means of defence against the danger of proletarian revolution.

In regard to the social relationships of today, which it acquired long before; that each particular individual represented an economic enterprise, theoretically susceptible of an active or

passive commerce, the superstition which encloses each individual in the circle of a moral reckoning of his acts, and the illusion of a life after death determined by this reckoning, is nothing but the reflection in the brain of man of present bourgeois society founded on private economy.

It is therefore impossible to lead the struggle for breaking through the framework of an economy of private enterprise and individual moral reckoning, without taking a position openly anti-religious and Anti-Christian.

## The capitalist cycle

In the principle countries, the modern bourgeoisie has already gone through three characteristic historic stages.

The bourgeoisie begins as an openly revolutionary class and leads an armed struggle to break the chains with which feudal and clerical absolutism tied the productive forces of peasants to the land and the artisans to medieval corporations (guilds).

The necessity of liberation from these chains presents itself at the same time as that of developing the productive forces, which with the resources of modern technique, tends to concentrate the workers into great masses.

In order to give a free development to these new economic forms, it is necessary to batter down by force, the traditional regimes. The bourgeois class not only lead the insurrectionary struggle, but established after its first victory, an iron dictatorship, in order to put an end to the monarchies, the feudal lords, and the ecclesiastical dignitaries' attempts to return to power.

### A

The capitalist class appears in history as an antiformist force, leading the process of breaking all material and ideological obstacles; its thinkers throw over the criteria of the antique world and its old beliefs in a most radical manner.

For the theories of the authority of divine right, they substitute those of popular sovereignty, of equality, and political liberty and proclaim the necessity of representative institutions. Pretending mercy, they claim the power will be the expression of a collective will, manifested freely, without restraint.

The liberal and democratic principle appears clearly revolutionary and antiformist in this phase, so much so that it is not applied by pacifist or legal methods, but goes over to violence

and revolutionary terror, through which the victorious class defends itself against the attempts at reactionary restorations by its dictatorship.

## B

In the second phase, the capitalist regime becomes stabilised. The bourgeoisie proclaims itself the representative of the higher development of the whole social collectivity of its welfare, and goes through a relatively tranquil development of productive forces; of submission of the whole world, adapted to its system; of intensification of the economic rhythm as a whole. This is the progressive and reformist phase of the capitalist cycle.

In this phase, parliamentary democracy functions parallel to the reformist orientation. The directing class is interested that its own organisation appear susceptible of representing and reflecting the interests and demands of the working class. Its government pretends to satisfy them with the economic measures and legislation designed to allow the legal norms of the bourgeois system to be maintained.

Parliamentarism and democracy are not revolutionary slogans any longer. They take on a reformist content which guarantees the development of the capitalist system in warding off the violent clashes and explosions of the class struggles.

## C

The third phase is that of modern imperialism, characterised by the monopolist concentration of the economy, the formation of unions and capitalist trusts and the great State plans.

The bourgeois economy transforms itself and loses the characteristics of classic liberalism, in which each business enterprise was autonomous in making its economic decisions, and in its relations to exchange. A more and more strict discipline is imposed on production and distribution. The economic indices of production and distribution are no longer the result of the free play of forces, but the influence of associations of capitalists at first, of organs of banking and finance afterwards, and finally the direction of the State. The political state, which in the Marxist parlance, was the executive committee of the bourgeoisie, and was as much government as police protector, asserted itself more and more as the organ of control and even of administration of the economy.

This concentration of economic powers in the hands of the state is not to be interpreted as a step from private economy to a collective economy. To do so, would be to ignore that the contemporary state expresses uniquely, the interests of a minority, and that all nationalisation realised in the framework of commodity exchange, leads to a concentration which strengthens

the capitalist character of the economy at the very point of its weakening. The political development of the parties of the bourgeoisie in this contemporary phase (as Lenin clearly proved in his critique of modern imperialism) lends itself to the most narrow forms of oppression; the advent of totalitarianism and fascist regimes was this manifestation.

These regimes constitute the most modern political type of bourgeois society in its present evolution. This will become always more evident as the road to be travelled by the whole world. A parallel aspect of this political concentration resides in the absolute predominance of a few great states at the expense of the autonomy of impoverished and minor states.

The appearance of this third capitalist phase is not to be confused with the return of forms of pre-capitalist institutions, since this phase is accompanied by a growth to giddy heights of an industrial and financial dynamic, ignored in quality and quantity in the pre-bourgeois world.

Capitalism repudiates the democratic and representative apparatus and establishes centres of government absolutely despotic.

In some countries it has already theorised and proclaimed the formation of one totalitarian party, and hierarchical centralisation. In other countries it continues to employ democratic slogans which are henceforth without content. All are marching inexorably in the same direction.

For a correct evaluation of the contemporary historic process, the correct position is the following: the period of liberalism and democracy is closed. The democratic demands, which had formerly a revolutionary character, afterwards progressive and reformist, are today anachronisms and clearly conformist.

## **Proletarian strategy in the different phases of the capitalist cycle**

The cycle of the proletarian movement corresponds to that of the capitalist world.

### **A**

During the formation of the great industrial proletariat, the critique of the economic, juridical and political formulations of the bourgeoisie makes its appearance. One discovers that the bourgeois class neither liberates nor emancipates humanity. It substitutes its own class domination and its system of exploitation for that of the other class which preceded it, and this discovery is theorised.

The workers of all countries do not struggle at all times by the side of the bourgeoisie in order to overthrow feudal institutions, and they do not fall into the trap of reactionary socialism, which, brandishing the spectre of a new, merciless capitalist employer, calls upon the workers to ally themselves with the leading monarchical and agrarian classes.

Even in the struggle that the young capitalist regimes lead to prevent reactionary restoration, the proletariat is unable to refuse support to the bourgeoisie.

The strategy of the proletariat begins to anticipate anti-bourgeois movements in the same spirit of the insurrectionary struggle as carried on at the side of the bourgeoisie, in a manner arriving immediately at the simultaneous liberation from feudal oppression and capitalist exploitation.

One finds an embryonic manifestation of this fact in the Great French Revolution with Babeuf's "League of the Equals".

Theoretically, this movement is immature; but the bourgeoisie exercising in its victory, an implacable repression against the workers who had fought for its interests, were given a significant historic lesson.

On the eve of the bourgeois and national revolutionary wave of 1848, the theory of the class struggle was already completely elaborated. The relationships between bourgeoisie and proletarian are henceforth very clear on the European and world scale.

Marx, in the Communist Manifesto, projected the alliance with the bourgeoisie against the parties of monarchical restoration in France and Prussian conservatism; at the same time that the immediate development towards a revolution envisaged the conquest of power by the working class. In this historic phase, the attempt at workers' revolt is mercilessly repressed, but the doctrine and strategy of the class corresponding to this phase confirms itself on the historic road of the marxist method.

The great attempt by the Paris Commune to produce in the same situation and corresponding to the same historic evaluation, which at the time the self-same French proletariat, after having overthrown Napoleon III, assured the victory of the Bourgeois Republic, attempted still, at the same time, the conquest of power, and gave for some months, the first historic example of its class government.

What is most significant and suggestive in this episode is the anti-proletarian alliance, without conditions, of the democratic bourgeoisie with the conservatives and with the victorious Prussian Army in order to crush the first attempt at the dictatorship of the proletariat.

## B

In the second phase, in which reformism is connected to the framework of bourgeois economy, representative and parliamentary systems are largely made use of. An alternative of historic significance poses itself for the proletariat.

Theoretically the question is posed as to the interpretation of revolutionary doctrine considered as a critique of bourgeois institutions and all the ideologies it defends.

The overthrow of capitalist domination and the substitution of a new economic order will take place with the violent collision, or will be able to arrive at a new economic order through gradual change and the use of parliamentary legalism.

In practice, the question is, to know whether the party of the working class must any longer associate itself with the bourgeoisie against the forces of pre-capitalist regimes, (those last are disappearing at the present time). At least allied with an advanced and progressive party of the bourgeoisie, more disposed to reform of its organisation.

The present revision of Marxism developed during the idyllic intermediate period of capitalism between 1871 and 1914. It falsified directives and the fundamental texts of the doctrine. It established a new strategy, according to which vast economic and political organisations of the working class must prepare a gradual transformation of the whole capitalist economic machine by penetrating and conquering the political institutions legally.

The polemics of this phase, divided the proletarian movement into opposing tendencies. Although in general, the question of the necessity of insurrectionary assault to break the bourgeois power was not posed, the left marxists resisted extremely vigorously, the tactic of collaboration in the unions and on the parliamentary plane. Therefore the left marxists were opposed to the proposition of support to bourgeois governments and opposed the participation of the socialist parties in ministerial coalitions.

## C

In the third phase capitalism faces the double necessity of continuing to develop the productive forces and avoid the break-down of the equilibrium of its organisation. That is why it is compelled to abandon liberal and democratic methods, leading to an equal concentration in the hands of the powerful state organs, of economic life, and political domination. In this phase as well, two alternatives are posed for the workers' movement.

Theoretically we must state the strictest form of domination by the capitalist class constitutes a necessary phase; the most developed and modern that capitalism has reached, in order to arrive at the end of its cycle, exhausting its historic possibilities.

Therefore the sharp use of political-police methods is not a temporary phenomena, after



which we would return to forms pretending liberal tolerance.

From the tactical viewpoint, it is false and illusory to pretend that the proletariat must begin a struggle to press capitalism to return to liberal and democratic concessions, because the climate of democratic politics is no longer necessary for the ultimate growth of capitalist productive energies, an indispensable premise for the socialist economy.

In the first revolutionary bourgeois phase, the question was not only posed by history, but found a solution in the parallel struggle of the Third and Fourth Estates; the alliance between the two classes being an indispensable step on the road toward socialism.

In the second phase, the question is legitimately posed of a parallel action between democratic reformism and the proletarian socialist parties. If history has given reason to answer, No, by the left revolutionary marxists to the revisionist right wing, and the reformists, they cannot be considered conformist before the fatal degeneration of 1914-1918. If in effect they believed the wheels of history turned at a slow rhythm, they still did not attempt to turn the wheels back. It is necessary to render this justice to Bebel, Jaurès and Turati.

In the present phase of Imperialism, which has seen the most avid and ferocious world wars, the question of a parallel action between the proletariat and the democratic bourgeoisie is no longer posed historically. Those who maintain the opposite view, no longer represent an alternative version or tendency of the workers' movement. They have made nothing but the complete passage to the conservatism of Conformism.

The only alternative posed today and to which it is necessary to answer to, is the other. The development of the world capitalist regime is centralist, totalitarian, and "fascist". Must the working class be allied to the movement that has become the sole Reformist aspect of the domination of the bourgeoisie? Can Socialism in its beginnings, be installed through this inexorable advance of State Capitalism? Should the working class help to disperse the last traditional resistance of the free-enterprisers, liberals, and bourgeois conformists of the first period?

Or, on the contrary, must the workers' movement, hard struck and dislocated for being incapable of realising its independence from class-collaboration in two world wars, reconstruct itself by rejecting such a method and the illusion that the bourgeois regime represents historically a bourgeois pacifist organisation susceptible of legal penetration, or at least, most vulnerable to the pressure of the masses (answers which constitute two forms equally dangerously defeatist in relation to the whole revolutionary movement)?

The dialectic method of Marxism answers this question of an alliance with the new modern bourgeois forms, for the same reasons that yesterday it fought the alliance with reformism of the democratic and pacifist phase.

Capitalism, dialectic premise of socialism, has no need of help in being born (affirming its revolutionary dictatorship), nor to grow (in its liberal and democratic phase).

In the modern phase, it must inevitably concentrate its economic and political forms in a monstrous unity.

Its transformation and its reformism assures its development at the same time as its conservatism.

The movement of the working class will reject succumbing to bourgeois domination by refusing aid to the developing phases, necessary to capitalism. The working class must recognise its forces outside of these antiquated perspectives, by freeing itself from the burden of old traditions and denouncing the whole historic epoch in which the working class retarded its own development because of tactical harmony with all forms of reformism.

## The Russian revolution

The most burning problem of contemporary history in the present epoch from the end of the world war, was the crisis of the czarist regime; its feudal state structure; and its backward capitalist development.

The Left Marxist, Lenin, and the Bolsheviks has already developed for decades its position with the strategic perspective of leading the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, simultaneously with all the anti-absolutist forces, for the overthrow of the feudal empire.

The war permitted the realisation of this great goal, and concentrated in the brief span of nine months, the passage of power from the hands of the dynasty, aristocracy and clergy, to that of the proletariat, while on the way, it passed through a government of bourgeois democratic parties.

This great development gave the world an enormous push on questions relating to the class struggle; the struggle for power; to the strategy of proletarian revolution, and to the regroupment of tendencies.

In this brief period, the strategy and tactics of the revolutionary party went through all the phases: — struggle by the side of the bourgeoisie, who were uneasy over the downfall of the old feudal state and tried to construct its own property system; split with and struggle against the reformist and gradualist parties of the workers' movement, until the exclusive monopoly of power was in the hands of the working class and the Communist Party.

The historic repercussion of these facts on the workers' movement was a crushing defeat for

revisionism and collaboration. The proletarian parties of all countries oriented themselves toward the armed struggle for power.

But the false interpretations produced by the application of Russian tactics and strategy to the other countries, relying on a Kerensky regime and applying a politics of coalition, which pretended support as a 'rope supports a hanging man', in order to deal the death blow at a decisive turning of events, were ruinous.

It is forgotten that in Russia, the successive phases of the movement relied intimately on the late formation of the political state of the capitalists. Whereas in the other countries this capitalist political state had been stabilised for a century, or at least for some decades and was stronger because its legal structure was most clearly democratic and parliamentary.

It is not understood that the alliance between Bolsheviks and non-Bolsheviks in the insurrectionary battles, and even sometimes to prevent the attempt at feudal restoration, represented historically the last example of such a relation of political forces. The proletarian revolution in Germany, for example, if it had been victorious, as Marx waited for the crisis of 1848, would have followed the same tactical line of the Russian Revolution: in 1918, the bourgeoisie would have been unable to win if the revolutionary communist party had had sufficient forces to sweep away the bloc of the Kaiser, the bourgeoisie, and the social-democrats in power in the Weimar Republic.

The International Communist movement swung completely away from the correct revolutionary strategy when Italy, presenting the first example of a totalitarian type of bourgeois government, assigned the proletariat to the struggle for liberty and constitutional guarantees within an anti-fascist coalition, a strategic position fundamentally false.

To confuse Hitler and Mussolini, reformers of the Capitalist regime in the most modern sense, with Kornilov or the forces of the restoration and of the Holy Alliance of 1815, is the greatest error of evaluation and signifies the total abandonment of the revolutionary method.

The imperialist phase, matured economically in all modern countries, appeared and will appear, in its fascist political form as a given succession of immediate relationship of forces between states and states, class and class in the various countries of the world.

This phase could be considered as a new opportunity for the revolutionary assault by the proletariat. But the proletariat is not taking the opportunity to do so. To confuse the forces of the communist vanguard with the illusory aim of stopping the bourgeoisie from abandoning its legality, or to demand a restoration of constitutional guarantees to the parliamentary system, is false. On the contrary, the proletariat must accept the historic issue of this instrument of bourgeois oppression and the invitation to struggle outside the legality in order to attempt to smash the rest of the apparatus — police, military, bureaucracy, and juridical — of the capitalist

power and the State.

The passage of the Communist Parties to the strategy of a great anti-fascist bloc, aggravated again in the anti-German war of 1939 with the slogans of national collaboration, partisan movements of committees of national liberation, up to the scandal of ministerial coalition, has signified the second disastrous defeat for the world revolutionary movement.

There can be no revival of the proletarian revolutionary movement as long as theory, organisation and action is not freed in struggle against this kind of politics which solidarises the socialist and communist parties inspired by Moscow.

The new movement must base itself on a political line precisely the opposite of the slogans of these opportunist movements, whose anti-fascism put them in a position completely in line with the fascist evolution of the social organisation.

The new revolutionary movement of the proletariat must base itself on the following line:

**1).** Reject the perspective according to which after the defeat of Italy, Germany and Japan, the phase of return to democracy would be reopened. On the contrary, confirmation that the war was accompanied by a transformation to fascist methods of government in the victor countries, even if the reformist and labourite parties participated in the government. Refuse to demand the return to liberal forms — an illusory demand and not to the interests of the proletariat.

**2).** Confirmation that the present Russian regime has lost its proletarian character, along with the abandonment of revolutionary politics by the Third International. This has lead back to the reestablishment of bourgeois content, in the political, economic and social forms of Russia. This evolution is not a return to antique forms of autocratic tyranny. or pre-bourgeois forms, but is the advent, by a different historic road of the same type of social organisation at present essentially evolved by State Capitalism of countries with a totalitarian regime. A regime in which the great State plans open up a road of important development and give those countries a high imperialist potential.

In face of such a situation, we do not demand that Russia return to parliamentary democratic forms, which are in decay in all the modern states. On the contrary, we work for the reestablishment of a completely revolutionary communist party in Russia.

**3).** Reject all invitation to national solidarity with classes and parties, who yesterday claimed the over-throw of that which they called totalitarian, in combating the Axis states, only in order to reconstruct it by legal methods, through the reconstruction of world capitalism, ruined by the war.

**4).** Reject the manoeuvre and tactic of the united front; that is, reject the invitation of so-called socialists and Communists, which cannot result in anything proletarian issuing forth from their

so-called proletarian unity.

**5).** Struggle against all ideologies which attempt to mobilise the working classes of different countries on the patriotic front for the third Imperialist War. Against the demand to fight for “Red” Russia against American-Anglo-Saxon Imperialism. Against supporting the democracy of the West against Stalinist totalitarianism in a war falsely presented as anti-fascist.

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Amadeo Bordiga. 1946

# Force, Violence and Dictatorship in the Class Struggle

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## I. Actual and Potential Violence

In the history of social aggregates we recognise the use of material force and violence in an overt form whenever we observe conflicts and clashes among individuals and among groups which result, through many different forms, in the material injury and destruction of physical individuals.

Whenever this aspect comes to the surface in the course of social history, it is received by the most varied reactions of abomination or of exaltation which in turn furnish the most banal foundations of the various successive mystical doctrines that fill and encumber the thought of the collectivities.

Even the most opposing conceptions are in agreement that violence among humans is not only an essential element of social energetics but also an integral factor, if not always a decisive one, of all the transformations of historical forms.

In order to avoid falling into rhetoric and metaphysics – such as those numerous confessions and philosophies which oscillate between either the apriorisms of the worship of force, of the “superman” or of the superior people, or else the apriorisms of resignation, non-resistance and pacifism – it is necessary to go back to the basis of that material relationship, physical violence. It is necessary to recognise its fundamental role in all forms of social organisation even when it acts only in its latent state, that is through pressure, threat and armed preparation which produce the most widespread historical effects even before there has been bloodshed, after it, or without it.

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The beginning of the modern age, which is socially characterised by the gigantic development of productive techniques and the capitalist economy, was accompanied by a fundamental conquest of scientific knowledge of the physical universe that is bound to the names of Galileo and Newton.

It became clear that two fields of phenomena which Aristotelian and scholastic physics had held as absolutely separate and even metaphysically opposite – the field of terrestrial mechanics and the field of celestial mechanics – were in reality one and the same and had to be investigated and represented with the same theoretical scheme.

In other words it was understood for the first time that the force which a body exerts on the ground on which it rests, or on our hand which supports it, not only is the same force which puts the body in motion when it is left free to fall but it is also the same force which governs the movements of the planets in space, their revolutions in apparently immutable orbits, and their possible collisions with each other.

It was not a question of a merely qualitative and philosophical identity but of a scientific and practical one, since the same kind of measurement could establish the dimensions of the fly-wheel of a machine and determine, for instance, the weight and the velocity of the moon.

The great conquests of knowledge – as could be shown by a study of gnoseology conducted with the Marxist method – do not consist in establishing new eternal and irrevocable truths by means of revealing discoveries, since the road always remains open to further developments and to richer scientific and mathematical representations of the phenomena of a given field. Instead, they consist essentially in definitively breaking down the premises of ancient errors, including the blinding force of tradition which prevented our knowledge from reaching a representation of the real relationships of things.

In fact, even in the field of mechanics science has and will make discoveries which go beyond the limits of Galileo's and Newton's laws and formulas. But the historical fact remains that they demolished the obstacle of the Aristotelian conception according to which an ideal sphere, concentric to the earth, separated two incompatible worlds – the earthly world of ours, that of corruption and wretched mortal life, and the celestial world of incorruptibility and of the icy, splendid immutability. This conception was profitably utilised by the ethical and mystical constructions of christianity and was perfectly adaptable as a social parallel of the relationships in a human world based on the privileges of aristocracies.

The identification of the field of mechanical facts revealed by our immediate experience with the field of cosmic facts allowed for it to be simultaneously established that the energy a body possesses is identical in substance whether its movement with respect to us and its immediate surroundings is empirically evident or whether this body itself is apparently at rest.

The two concepts of potential energy (energy with respect to position or positional energy) and of kinetic energy (the energy of motion) when applied to material bodies will be and have already been subjected to more and more complex interpretations. These interpretations will lead to the point where the quantities of matter and energy which appeared invariable in the formulations of the classical physics texts (and which are still adequate to calculate and construct structures on the human scale that utilise non-atomic forms of energy) will prove to be transmutable through an incessant exchange whose radius of action extends to the entire cosmos.

However, it still remains that the recognition of the identity in their action between the potential reserves and the kinetic manifestations of energy was a historically decisive step in the formation of scientific knowledge.

This scientific concept has become familiar to everyone living in the modern world. Water contained in an elevated tank is still and appears motionless and lifeless. Let us open the valves of the pipeline with a turbine situated below and the turbine will be set in motion yielding us motive power. The amount of available power was already known before we opened the valve since it depends on the mass of the water and on its height: that is to say it is positional energy.

When the water flows and moves, the same energy manifests itself as motion, i.e. as kinetic energy.

By the same token, any child of today knows that if we do not touch the two still, cold wires of an electric circuit, no exchange will take place between them; but if we introduce a conductor, sparks, heat and light are emitted with violent effects on muscles and nerves if the conductor is our body.

The two harmless wires had a certain potential, but woe to whomever transforms this energy into a kinetic state. Today all this is known even by the illiterate but it would have greatly baffled the seven sages of ancient Greece and the doctors of the church.



Let us now pass from the field of mechanics to that of organic life. Among the much more complex manifestations and transformations of biophysics and biochemistry which govern the birth, nourishment, growth, motion and reproduction of animals, we find the use of muscular power in the struggle against the physical environment as well as against other living beings of the same or of different species.

In these material contacts and in these brutal clashes the parts and the tissues of the animals are hurt and lacerated and in the cases of the most serious injuries, the animal dies.



The intervention of the factor of violence is commonly recognised only when an injury to an organism results from the use of muscular power by one animal against another. We do not see violence, in common language, when a landslide or a hurricane kills animals but only when the classic wolf devours the lamb or comes to blows with another wolf which claims a share of it.

Gradually the common interpretation of these facts slips down into the deceitful field of ethical and mystical constructions. One hates the wolf but one weeps for the lamb. Later on man will legitimise without question the killing of the same lamb for his meal but will scream with horror against cannibals; murderers will be condemned but warriors will be exalted. All these cases of the cutting and tearing of living flesh can be found in an infinite gamut of tones which furnish the prolific soil for endless literary variations. Among them we also could include – to give an ethical problem to those who would judge our actions – the incision of the surgical knife on the cancerous tumour.

The early human representations, with the inadequacy which characterised them, investigated the phenomena of mechanical nature and, due to an infantile anthropomorphism, applied moral criteria to these phenomena.

Earth returned to the earth, water returned to the sea and air and fire rose because each element sought its own element, its natural position, and shunned its opposites, since love and hatred were the moving forces of things.

If water or mercury did not drop down in the overturned vessel it was because nature abhorred a vacuum. After Torricelli had carried out a barometric vacuum, it became possible to measure the weight of the air, which also is a heavy body and tends downwards with such violence that it would crush us to the ground if we were not surrounded and penetrated all over by it. Air therefore does love its opposites after all and should be condemned for an adulterous violation of its duties.

In every field, to one extent or another, voluntarism and ethicism lead man to believe in the same stupidities.

Going back to the violent struggle of the animal against adversities or to the struggle for the satisfaction of his needs through the use of his muscular strength (and leaving aside the bourgeois Darwinian discourse on the struggle for survival, natural selection and similar refrains) we shall point out that here too the same motives and effects of the use of force can present themselves as potential or virtual on one side, and as kinetic or actual on the other.

The animal who has experienced the dangers of fire, ice and flood will learn that instead of confronting them it is best to flee as soon as he perceives the danger signs. In the same way violence between two living beings can exercise its effects in many cases without being physically manifested.

The wild dog will never contend with the lion for the killed roe-buck since he knows that he would follow the same destiny as the victim. Many times the prey succumbs from terror before being actually seized by the carnivore; sometimes a glance is enough to immobilise it and deprive it not only of the possibility of struggle but also of flight itself.

In all these cases the supremacy of force has a potential effect without need of being materially carried out.

If our ethical judge should pass sentence on the matter, we doubt that he would acquit the carnivore on the sole ground that his prey had freely chosen to be devoured.



In the primitive human aggregates the network of the relationships among individuals grows and extends itself progressively. The greater variety of needs and of the means to satisfy them, in addition to the possibility of communication between one being and another due to the differentiations of language, all give rise to a sphere of relationships and influences which in the animal world were only roughly outlined.

Even before it is possible to speak of a true production of objects of use that can be employed for the satisfaction of the needs and necessities of human life, a division of functions and of aptitudes to carry them out is established among the members of the first groups, who devote themselves to the tasks of harvesting wild vegetables, of hunting, of fishing and of the first rudimentary activity in the construction and conservation of shelters and in the preparation of food.

An organised society begins to form itself and with it arises the principle of order and authority. The individuals who have a superior physical strength and nervous energy no longer resort only to muscular strength to impose fixed limits on others in the use of their time and their labour and in the enjoyment of the useful goods that have been acquired. Rules begin to be established to which the community adapts itself. Respect of these rules is imposed without the needs of using physical coercion every time; it suffices to threaten the would-be transgressor with fierce punishment and in extreme cases with death.

The individual who, driven by his primitive animality, might want to elude such impositions must either engage in a hand-to-hand combat with the leader (and probably also with the other members of the collectivity who would be ordered to back their leader in exercising the punishment) or else the individual must flee from the collectivity. But in this last case he would be compelled to satisfy his material needs less abundantly and with more risks since he would be deprived of the advantages of organised collective activity, however primitive it might be.

The human animal begins to trace his evolutionary cycle, a cycle which certainly is neither uniform and continuous nor without crises and reversals but which, in a general sense, is unrestrainable. From his original condition of unlimited personal freedom, of total autonomy of the single individual, he becomes more and more subjected to an increasingly dense network of bonds which takes the features and the names of order, authority, and law.

The general trend of this evolution is the lessening of the frequency of cases in which violence among men is consumed in its kinetic form, i.e. with struggle, corporal punishment and execution. But, at the same time, the cases in which authoritarian orders are executed without resistance become doubly more frequent, since those whom the orders are addressed to know by experience that it would not pay to elude these dictates.

A simplistic schematisation and idealisation of such a process leads to an abstract conception of society which sees only two entities, the individual and the collectivity, and arbitrarily assumes that all the relationships of each individual to the organised collectivity are equivalent (such as in the illusory perspective of the "Social Contract"). This theory postulates the ongoing march of the human collectivity as being conducted either by an obliging god who leads the drama towards a happy ending or else by a redeeming inspiration, more mysterious still, which is placed who knows how in each person's mind and is immanent to his way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. It is presented as a march which leads to a idyllic equilibrium in which an egalitarian order allows everybody to enjoy the benefits of the common work, while the decisions of each individual are free and freely willed.

Dialectical materialism on the contrary, scientifically sets into relief the importance of the factor of force and its influence not only when it is overtly manifested, such as in wars among peoples and classes, but also when it is applied in a potential state by means of the functioning of the machinery of authority, of law, of constituted order and of armed power. It explains that the origin and the extension of the use of force springs from the relationships in which individuals are placed as a result of the striving and the possibility to satisfy their needs.

If we analyse the ways and means by which human aggregates since prehistory have procured their means of subsistence, as well as the first rudimentary devices, arms and tools that extend the reach of the limb of animal man to act over external bodies, we will be led to the discovery of an extremely rich variety of relationships and intermediate positions between the individual and the totality of the collectivity which are the basis of a division of this collectivity into many diverse groups, according to attributions, functions and satisfactions. This investigation furnishes us the key to the problem of force.

The essential element of that which is commonly called civilisation is this: the stronger individual consumes more than the weaker one (and up until this point we remain within the field of the relationships of animal life and, if we want, we can also add here that so-called

“nature”, which bourgeois theories conceive of as a clever supervisor, provided for the fact that more muscles means more stomach and more food); but the stronger also arranges things in such a way that the major share of the workload falls on the weaker one. If the weaker refuses to grant the richest meal and the easiest job (or no job at all) to the stronger, then muscular superiority subdues him and inflicts on him the third humiliation of being struck.

The distinctive element of civilisation, as we said, is that this simple relationship explained above is materialised innumerable times in all the acts of social life with no need to use coercive force in its actual, kinetic form.

The division of men into groups which are so dissimilar in their material situation of life has its basis initially in a distribution of tasks. It is this which, in a great complexity of manifestations, assures the privileged individual, family, group, or class a recognition of its position. This recognition, which has its origins in a real consideration of the initial utility of the privileged elements, leads to the formation of an attitude of submission among the victimised elements and groups. This attitude is handed down in time and becomes part of tradition since social forms have an inertia which is analogous to that of the physical world; due to this inertia these social forms tend to trace the same orbits and to perpetuate the same relationships if superior causes do not introduce a disruption.

Let us continue our analysis, which even the reader who is unfamiliar with the Marxist method will understand to be a schematic explanation for the sake of brevity. When for the first time the minus habens (the have-not) not only does not constrain his exploiter to use force in order to compel him to execute the orders, but also learns to repeat that rebellion is a great disgrace since it jeopardises the rules and order on which everybody's salvation depends – at this point, hats off please, the Law is born.

The first kings were clever hunters, valiant warriors who risked their life and shed their blood for the defence of the tribe; the first wizards were intelligent investigators of the secrets of nature useful for curing illnesses and for the well-being of the tribe; the first masters of slaves or of wage labourers were capable organisers of the productive efforts for the best yield in the cultivation of the land or in the use of the first technologies. The initial recognition of the useful function they fulfilled led them to build the apparatus of authority and power. This apparatus permitted those who were at the top of the new and more profitable forms of social life to appropriate, for their own enjoyment, a large portion of the increased production that had been realised.

Man first submitted the animals of other species to such a relationship. The wild ox was subjugated to the yoke for the first time only after a harsh struggle and with the sacrifice of the boldest tamers. Later, actual violence was no longer necessary in order to make the animal lower his head. The powerful effort of the ox multiplied the quantity of grain at the master's disposal

and the ox, for its nourishment and for the preservation of its muscular efficiency, received a fraction of the crops.

The evolved homo sapiens did not wait long to apply this same relationship to his fellow-man with the rise of slavery. The adversary, defeated in a personal or in a collective conflict, the prisoner of war, crushed and hurt, is forced with further violence to work with the same economic contracts as the ox. At the beginning he may have revolted, rarely being able to overwhelm the oppressor and escape his grip; in the long run the normal situation is that the slave, even if superior to his master in muscular strength just as is the ox, suffers under his yoke and functions like the animal – only providing a much wider range of services than the beast.

Centuries pass and this system builds its own ideology, it is theorised; the priest justifies it in the name of the gods and the judge with his penalties prohibits it from being violated. There is a difference, and a superiority of the man of the oppressed class over the ox: no one could ever teach the ox to recite in a most spontaneous way, a doctrine according to which the drag of the plough is an immense advantage for him, a healthy and civilised joy, a fulfilment of God's will and an accomplishment of the sanctity of the law, nor will it ever happen that the ox officially acknowledges all this by casting votes in a ballot box.

Our long discourse on such an elementary subject aims at this result: to credit the fundamental factor of force with the sum-total of effects which are derived from it not only when force is employed in its actual state, with violence against the physical person, but also and above all when it acts in its potential or virtual state without the uproar of the fight and the shedding of blood.

Crossing the centuries (and avoiding a repetition of the analysis of the successive historical forms of productive relationships, of class privileges, and of political power) we must come to an application of this result and this criterion to present-day capitalist society.

It is thus possible to defeat the tremendous contemporary mobilisation of deceit, the big universal production which provides for the ideological subjugation of the masses to the sinister dictates of the dominant minorities. The fundamental trick of all this machinery is "atrocitism": that is, the exhibition (which incidentally is often corroborated by powerful falsifications of facts) of all the episodes of material aggression in which social violence, as a result of the relationships of force, is manifested and consumed in blows, gunshots, in killings and in atomic massacres – and this last would certainly have appeared as the most infamous if the producer of this show had not had tremendous success in stupefying the world.

It will thus be possible to give the proper consideration, the quantitatively and qualitatively preponderant importance, to the countless cases in which aggression, resulting always in misery, suffering and destruction of human life on a tremendous scale, is exercised without resistance, without clashes and – as we said at the beginning – without bloodshed even in times and places

in which social peace and order seem to be dominant. This is the social peace and order that is boasted of by the professional pimps of spoken and written propaganda as being the full realisation of civilisation, order, and freedom.

In comparing the importance of both factors – violence in an actual state and violence in a potential state – it will be evident that despite of all the hypocrisies and scandalmongerings, the second factor is the predominant one. It is only on such a basis that it is possible to build a doctrine and to wage a struggle capable of breaking the limits of the present world of exploitation and oppression.

## II. The Bourgeois Revolution

The research we have engaged in regarding the “dosage” of violence exercised in its actual state (through physical beatings and injuries) and violence left at its potential state (by subduing the dominated to the will of the dominators through the complex play of penalties threatened but not exercised) if applied to all social forms which preceded the bourgeois revolution would prove to be too lengthy. For this reason we shall consider the question by starting from a comparison of the social world of the “ancien régime” which preceded the great revolution with that of capitalist society in which we have the great joy to be living.

According to a first and well known interpretation, the revolution which carried into effect the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity, as expressed in the elective institutions, was a universal and final conquest for mankind. This was claimed on the basis

- 1) that it radically improved the conditions of life of all the members of society by freeing them from the old oppressions and by opening up for them the joy of a new world and
- 2) that it eliminated the historical eventuality of any further social conflict which could violently shatter the newly established institutions and relationships.

A second interpretation which is less naïve and less impudently apologetic about the delightfulness of the bourgeois system, recognises that it still harbours large differences of social conditions and economic exploitation to the detriment of the working class and that further transformations of society must be carried out through more or less brusque or gradual means. However it maintains with absolute obstinacy that the conquests of the revolution that brought the capitalist class to power represented a substantial advancement also for the other classes which, thanks to it, gained the inestimable advantage of legal and civil liberties. Therefore, it alleges that the question is only that of proceeding on the road that has already been opened up; that is to say, it is claimed that all that is necessary is to eliminate the remaining

forms of despotism and exploitation – after having eliminated the most severe and atrocious ones – all the while keeping hold of those first fundamental conquests. This worn out interpretation is served to us in many forms. This is the case when Roosevelt, from the summit of the pyramid of power, deigned to add new liberties, freedom from need and freedom from fear, to the well known liberties of the old literature (and this at a time when a war of unprecedented violence was raging, bringing an extermination and starvation of human beings beyond any previous limit). This is also the case when, from the base of the pyramid, a naïve representative of the vulgar popular politicking formulates, with new words, the old concoction of democracy and socialism by chattering about social liberties which should be added to those that have already been achieved.

We should not need to recall that the Marxist analysis of the historical process of the rise of capitalism has nothing to do with the two interpretations we have mentioned.

In fact, Marx never said that the degree of exploitation, oppression and abuse in capitalist society was inferior to that of feudal society but, on the contrary, he explicitly proved the opposite.

Let us say right now, in order to avoid any serious misunderstanding, that Marx proclaimed that it was a historical necessity for the Fourth Estate to fight side by side with the revolutionary bourgeoisie against the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the clergy. He condemned the doctrines of “reactionary” socialism according to which the workers – warned in time of the wild exploitation to which they would be subjected by the capitalists in the manufacturing and industrial plants – should have blocked with the leading feudal class against the capitalists. The most orthodox and left-wing Marxism recognises that in the first historical phase which follows the bourgeois revolution, the strategy of the proletariat could not be other than that of a resolute alliance with the young Jacobean bourgeoisie. These clear-cut classical positions are not derived at all from the assumption that the new economic system is less bestial and oppressive than the previous one. They result instead from the dialectical conception of history which explains the succession of events as being determined by the productive forces which, through constant expansion and utilisation of always new resources, weigh down upon the institutional forms and the established systems of power, thus causing crises and catastrophes.

Thus revolutionary socialists have been following the victories of modern capitalism for more than a century in its impressive expansion all over the world and they consider this as useful conditions of social development. This is so because the essential characteristics of capitalism (such as the concentration of productive forces, machines and men into powerful units, the transformation of all use values into exchange values and the interconnection of all the economies of the world) constitute the only path that leads, after new gigantic social conflicts have taken place, to the realisation of the new communist society. All this remains true and necessary although we know perfectly well that the modern industrial capitalist society is worse

and more ferocious than those which preceded it.

Of course, it is difficult for this conclusion to be digested by minds which have been shaped by bourgeois ideology and which have been ingrained with the idealisms pullulating from the romantic period of the liberal democratic revolutions. In fact if our thesis is judged according to sentimentalist, literary and rhetorical criteria, it cannot but arouse the banal indignation from those righteous people who would not fail to confront us with their jumbled erudition about the cruelties of the old despotisms – the autos-da-fé, the Holy Inquisition, the corvées of the serfs, the right of the king as well as the last feudal squire to dispose of the life and death of their subjects, the *jus primae noctis* and so forth – thus showing us that pre-bourgeois societies were the theatre for daily incessant violence and that their institutions were dripped with blood.

But if the research is founded on a scientific and statistical basis and if we consider the amount of human work extorted without compensation in order to allow a privileged enjoyment of wealth; if we consider the poverty and misery of the lower social strata; if we consider the lives which are sacrificed and broken as a result of economic hardships and of the crises and clashes which break out in the form of private feuds, civil wars, or military conflicts among states; if we consider all this, the heaviest index shall have to be computed and attributed to this civilised, democratic and parliamentary bourgeois society.

In response to the scandalised accusation of those who reproach the communists for aiming at the destruction of private property, Marx answered – and it is a fundamental point – that one of the basic aspects of the social upheaval brought forth by capitalism was the violent, inhuman expropriation of the artisan labourer. Before the rise of the large manufactures and mechanised factories, the isolated craftsman (or one who worked in association with a few relatives and apprentices) was bound to his tools as well as to the products of his work by a factual, technical and economic tie. The right of ownership over his few implements and over the limited amount of commodities produced in his shop was, in fact, legally recognised with no limitation. The coming of capitalism crushes this patriarchal and almost idyllic system. It defrauds the intelligent industrious craftsman of his modest possessions and drags him, dispossessed and starving, into the forced labour camps of the modern bourgeois enterprise. While this upheaval unfolds, often with open violence and always under the pressure of inexorable economic forces, the bourgeois ideologists define its legal aspects as a conquest of liberty which frees the working citizen from the fetters of the medieval guilds and trade rules, transforming him into a free man in a free state.

Such was the process which manufacturing industry underwent on the whole, and the presentation, in Marxist terms, of the development of agricultural production is not much different. To be sure, the system of feudal servitude obliged the labourer of the soil to give up a large portion of his production for the benefit of the dominant classes, i.e. the nobility and the clergy. But the serf who was bound to the soil maintained a technical and productive tie with the



earth itself and with a part of the products, a tie which indirectly offered him a guarantee of a secure, quiet life (a situation which was also due to the low population density and to the limited exchange of products with the large urban centres).

The capitalist revolution breaks those relationships and claims to free the serf-peasant from a whole series of abuses. However the land labourer, reduced to a pure proletarian, follows the destiny of the slave-army of industrial labourers, or else he is transformed into a fully legal manager or owner of a small plot of land, only to be dispossessed by the capitalist usurer, the tax collector, or through the melting away of the value of money.

It is not in the scope of this work to go into a detailed analysis of this process. However the elementary considerations we have made will be enough to answer those who pretend they have never heard before that Marx considered the new bourgeois society to be more infamous than feudal society.

The essential point to establish is this: the differentiating criterion which must be used in order to know if a new historical movement should be supported or combated is not whether or not this movement has realised and accorded more equality, justice and freedom, which would be an inconsistent and trivially literary criterion. Instead it is the totally different and almost always opposite criterion of asking whether the new situation has promoted and brought forth the development of more powerful and complex productive forces at society's disposal.

These more highly developed forces are the indispensable condition for the future organisation of society itself in the sense of a more efficient utilisation of labour which will be able to provide a larger amount of consumer goods for the benefit of all.

It was not only useful but also absolutely necessary for the bourgeoisie, by means of civil war, to demolish the institutional obstacles which hampered the development of large factories and the modern exploitation of the land. If we consider these results, it does not matter that the first and immediate consequence, a transitory one on a larger historical scale, was that of making the chains of the social disparity and the exploitation of the labour force heavier and more hideous.

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The critique of scientific socialism has clearly shown that the great social transformation achieved by capitalism (a transformation which historically has fully matured and which in turn is fertile with further great developments) cannot be defined either as a radical liberation of the vast masses or as a meaningful leap forward in their standard of living. The transformation of the institutions concerns only the mode in which the small, dominant, privileged minority aligns and organises itself in society.

The members of the pre-bourgeois privileged classes formed a system of complex hierarchies. The high-ranking ecclesiastics belonged to the ordered and well-organised network of the church; the noblemen, who also occupied the highest civil and military offices, were hierarchically arranged in the feudal system which had at its summit the King.

It is quite different in the new type of society (and it must be understood that we are referring here to the first and classical type of bourgeois economic society based on the unlimited freedom of production and exchange and leaving aside the great differences between the various nations and historical phases). In this society the members of the higher and privileged stratum are almost totally free from ties of interdependence since each factory owner has no personal obligations towards his colleagues and competitors in the management of his company and in the choice of his initiatives. This technical and social change, in the ideological field, takes the appearance of a historical turn from the realm of authority to that of freedom.

It is clear however that this conquest, this sensational change of scenery, did not take place on the theatre of the entire social collectivity but only within the narrow circles of the fortunate stratum of full and gilded bellies, to which we may add the small following of accomplices and direct agents, i.e. politicians, journalists, priests, teachers, high officials and the rest.

The mass of half-empty bellies are not absent in this gigantic tragedy – on the contrary, they participate in it fighting with the sacrifice of their lives and blood. What they are excluded from is the participation in the benefits of this transformation.

The conquest of legal freedom, which all charters and constitutions claim to be the heritage of all citizens does not concern the majority who are even more exploited and starved than before; in reality this conquest is only the internal affair of a minority. All the contemporary and historical questions which have been placed again before the nauseating postulate of freedom and democracy must be resolved in light of this approach.

On the scale of the individual, the materialist thesis states that since the mind functions only when the stomach is nourished, the theoretical right to freely think and to freely express one's thought in fact concerns only he who actually has the possibility of such superior activity. Of course it is perfectly contestable whether those who constantly boast of having attained this superior activity actually should be credited with it, but in any case it is certainly precluded for the mass of poorly-fed bellies.

The harshness of this thesis customarily unchains a sequence of bitter reproaches against the “vulgar obscene materialism”. This materialism is accused of taking into account only the factor of economics and nourishment, ignoring the glorious realm of spiritual life and refusing to acknowledge those satisfactions which are not reducible to physical sensations, i.e. those which man is supposed to draw from the use of reason, from the exercise of civil liberties, and from the enjoyment of electoral rights by which the citizen chooses his representatives and the heads of

state.

Here we have nothing new to present and at the most we will only verify well-known theories with recent facts. Therefore in regard to these reproaches it is necessary once again to establish the real scope of the economic determinism professed by Marxists as opposed to a common deformation which is more obstinate in refusing to disappear than scabies or other contagious diseases. This deformation reduces the problem to the petty individual scale and pretends that the political, philosophical or religious opinions of each individual are derived from his economic relationships in society and mechanically spring forth from his desires and interests. Hence the large landowner will be a right-wing reactionary bigot; the bourgeois businessman will be a conservative in regards to economics but sometimes, at least until recently, vaguely leftist in philosophy and politics; the petty bourgeois will be more or less democratic; and the worker will be a materialist, a socialist and a revolutionary.

Such a Marxism, custom-made for the bourgeois democrats, is very convenient for optimistically declaring that since the economically oppressed workers constitute the great majority of the population, it will not be long before they have control of the representative and executive organs and, later on, all wealth and capital. Naturally for the rapid movement of this merry-go-round it will be of great advantage to swing the political opinions, beliefs and movements towards the left, forming blocs and jumbled conglomerations with all the slime of the middle strata which supposedly are progressively evolving and taking a position against the politics and privileges of the upper classes.

In place of this stupid caricature, Marxism draws a totally different picture. While speaking of the ideological, political and mystical superstructures which find their explanation in the underlying economic conditions and relationships, Marxism establishes a law and a method which have a general and social relevance. In order to explain the significance of the ideology which, in a given historical epoch, prevails among a people who are governed through a given regime, we must base our analysis on data concerning the productive techniques and the relationships of the distribution of goods and products. In other words, we must base it on the class relationships between the privileged groups and the collectivities of producers.

Briefly, and in plain words, the law of economic determinism states that in each epoch the general prevailing opinions, the political, philosophical and religious ideas which are shared and followed by the great majority are those which correspond to the interests of a dominant minority who holds all power and privilege in its hands. Hence the priests and wisemen of the ancient oriental peoples justify despotism and human sacrifice, those of the pagan civilisations preach that slavery is just and beneficial, those of the christian age exalt property and monarchy, and those of the epoch of democracy and the Enlightenment canonise the economic and juridical systems suitable to capitalism.

When a particular type of society and production enters into a crisis and when forces arise in the technical and productive domain which tend to break its limits, class conflicts become more acute and are reflected in the rise of new doctrines of opposition and subversion which are condemned and attacked by the dominant institutions. When a society is in crisis, one of the characteristics of the phase which opens up is the continuous relative decrease in the number of those who benefit from the existing regime; nevertheless, the revolutionary ideology does not prevail in the masses but is crystallised only in a vanguard minority that is joined even by elements of the dominant class. The masses will change ideologically, philosophically and religiously through the force of inertia and through the formidable means utilised by every dominant class for the moulding of opinions, but this transformation will occur only after a long period following the collapse of the old structures of domination. We can even state that a revolution is truly mature when the actual physical fact of the inadequacy of the systems of production places these systems into conflict even with the material interests of a large section of the privileged class itself. And this is true in spite of the fact that the old traditional dictates of the dominant opinions, with their tremendous reactionary inertia, continue to be endlessly repeated by the mass which is the victim of it as well as by the superior layers which are the depositories of the regime.

Thus slavery definitively collapsed, in spite of an obstinate resistance on the level of ideology and that of force, when it proved to be a system which was scarcely profitable for the exploitation of labour and which was of little advantage for the slave-masters.

To say it briefly, the liberation of an oppressed class does not proceed first from the liberation of the spirit and then of the body but it must emancipate the stomach well before it can affect the brain.

The forces for deceptively mobilising the opinions of the masses in a way which conforms to the interests of the privileged class are, in capitalist society, much more powerful than in pre-bourgeois societies. Schools, the press, public speeches, radios, motion pictures, and associations of all kinds represent means which are a hundred times more powerful than those that were available to societies in the past. In the capitalist regime, thought is a commodity and it is made to order by utilising the necessary equipment and economic means for its mass production. Germany and Italy had their Ministries of Propaganda and People's Culture, and Great Britain, in turn, instituted its Ministry of Information at the beginning of World War II in order to monopolise and control the whole flow of news. In the period between the two World Wars, the dispatch of news was already a monopoly of the powerful network of the British press agencies; today such a monopoly obviously has crossed the Atlantic. Thus as long as military operations were favourable for the Germans the daily production of tall tales and lies from the English information factory attained a level that the fascist organisations could only envy. To give one example, at the time of the incredible German military operation to conquer Norway in 48 hours, the British radio broadcasted the details of a disastrous defeat of the German fleet in

the Skagerrak!

The social factor of the manipulation of ideas, which ranges from the falsification of the news to the fabrication of ready-made critics and opinions, is of no small importance (in fact, in the news industry today the various versions of an event are already compiled before the event actually happens, so even if a reporter seems to tell it like it is, it still remains a falsehood – the event that is reported is always the event which must take place according to this or that state or this or that party). This manipulation of ideas is a component of that mass of virtual violence, that is to say, of violence which does not take the form of a brutal imposition carried out with coercive means but which nonetheless is the result and the manifestation of real forces that deform and modify the actual situation.

The modern type of democratic bourgeois society does not joke with the administration of actual (or kinetic) violence through its police and military apparatus – and in reality it exceeds the level of kinetic violence used by the old regimes which are so slandered by bourgeois democracy. But alongside of this, it brings the volume of that application of virtual violence to a level never known before, a level which is comparable to the unprecedented level of production and the concentration of wealth. Due to this, sections of the masses appear which, out of apparently free choices of confessions, opinions, and beliefs, act against their own objective interests and accept the theoretical justifications of social relationships and events which cause their misery and even their destruction.

The passage from the pre-bourgeois forms to the present society has thus increased and not diminished the intensity and the frequency of the factor of oppression and coercion.

And when Marxism, for all these reasons we have explained, advocates the full completion of that fundamental historical step, we certainly do not intend to forget or to contradict this fundamental position.

It is only with criteria which are consistent with those we have established above, that we can judge and unravel one of the burning questions of today, i.e. the transformation of the bourgeois method of administration and government corresponding to the rise of the dictatorial and fascist totalitarian regimes.

Such a transformation does not represent a change of one ruling class for another, or even less a revolutionary rupture of the modes of production. But while making this critique it is necessary to avoid the banal errors which, in line with the deviations of Marxism we have been refuting, would lead to attributing to the democratic-parliamentary form and phase a lesser intensity and density of class violence.

This criterion, even if it were in keeping with the facts, would not in any case be sufficient to induce us to support and defend the democratic-parliamentary phase, for the same dialectical

reasons that we have used in evaluating the previous historical changes. But an analysis of this question can demonstrate that to refuse the temptation of considering only actual violence and to take into account, on the contrary, the whole volume of potential violence which is inherent to the life and dynamics of society, is the only way to avoid falling into the deception of preferring (even if it is in a subordinate and relative manner) the hypocritical method and the noxious atmosphere of liberal democracy.

### **III. The Democratic Form and the Fascist Form of Bourgeois Rule**

This work examines the extent to which force is used in social relationships, distinguishing between the two forms in which violence is manifested: the open manifestations which are carried out up to the point of massacre; and the mechanism of social rules which are obeyed by the affected individual or group without physical resistance, due to the threat of punishment inflicted on offenders or, in any case, due to the predisposition of the victims to accept the norms which rule over them.

In the first chapter we have established a comparison between the two types of manifestation of energy in the social domain and the two forms in which energy is manifested in the physical world: the actual or kinetic form (or energy of motion) which accompanies the collisions and explosions of the most varied agents; and the virtual or potential form (or energy of position) which even if it does not produce such effects plays just as great a role in the collection of events and relationships under consideration.

This comparison – developed from the field of physics to that of biology, then to that of human society – has been carried out with brief references to the course of historical epochs. Arriving at the present bourgeois capitalist period we have shown that in this period the play of force and violence in the economic, social, and political relationships between individuals and above all between classes not only has an enormous and fundamental role but – inasmuch as we can measure it – becomes much more frequent and widespread than in previous epochs and pre-capitalist societies.

In a more exhaustive study we could use a social- economic measurement if we try to translate into figures the value of human labour extorted to the benefit of the privileged classes from the great masses who work and produce. In modern society there is a constant decrease in the proportion of individuals and economic groupings which succeed in living in their own autonomous cycle, consuming what they produce without external relationships. Simultaneously there has been an enormous increase in the number of those who work for others and who receive a remuneration that compensates them for only a part of their work; likewise there has

been an enormous increase in the social gap between the living standard of the great productive majority and that of the members of the possessing classes. In fact what is important is not the individual existence of one or only a few tycoons who live in luxury, but the mass of wealth which a social minority can use for its pleasures of all kinds while the majority receives only a little more than is absolutely necessary for existence.

Since our subject deals more with the political aspect of the question than the economic, the question we must pose in regard to the regime of capitalist privilege and rule is that of the relationship between the use of brute violence and that of potential force which compels the impoverished to submit to the rules and laws in force without violating them or revolting.

This relationship varies greatly according to the various phases of the history of capitalism and according to the various countries where capitalism has been introduced. We can cite examples of neutral and idyllic zones where the power of the state is exalted as being freely accepted by all the citizens; where there is only a small police force and where even the social conflicts between workers and employers are solved through peaceful means. But these Switzerlands tend, in time and space, to become more and more rare oases in the world-wide capitalist system.

At its birth capitalism could not conquer its ground without open and bloody struggle since the shackles of the state organisation of the old regime could only be broken through force. Its expansion in the non-European continents with its colonial expeditions and wars of conquest and pillage was no less bloody, because only through massacre could the mode of social organisation of the native population be replaced by that of capitalism, and in some cases this meant the extermination of entire human races, something unknown in prebourgeois civilisation.

In general, after this virulent phase of the birth and foundation of capitalism, an intermediate period of its development begins. Although this period is marked by constant social clashes, by the repression of revolts of the exploited classes, and by wars between states which however do not embrace all the known world, it is the one which has more than any other given rise to the liberal and democratic apologia that falsely depicts a world in which – except for exceptional and pathological cases – the relationships between individuals and between social strata are supposed to have taken place with a maximum of order, peace, spontaneous consent and free acceptance.

Let us say incidentally that in these colonial or national wars, revolts, insurrections, or repressions – which constitute, even in the smoother and calmer phases of bourgeois history, the areas in which open violence is unleashed – the bloodshed and the number of victims in these crises tend to increase, all the other conditions being equal, with respect to the crises of the past, and for this we can thank “progressive” bourgeois technological development. In fact, in parallel with the improvement of the means of production, the means of attack and destruction are made

more and more potent, more powerful weapons are created, and the casualties which Caesar's praetorians could inflict by putting rebels to the sword were a joke compared to those which machine-gun fire can inflict against the insurgents of the modern epoch.

But our aim is to show that even in long phases of bloodless enforcement of capitalist rule, class force does not cease to be present, and its influence in its potential state against the possible deviations of isolated individuals, organised groups or parties remains the primary factor in conserving the privileges and institutions of the ruling class. We have already cited among the manifestations of this class force not only the entire state apparatus, with its armed forces and its police, even when its weapons are kept at rest, but also the whole arsenal of ideological indoctrination which justifies bourgeois exploitation and is carried out by means of the schools, the press, the church and all the other ways by which the opinions of the masses are moulded. This epoch of apparent tranquillity is only disturbed occasionally by unarmed demonstrations of the proletarian class organisations; and the bourgeois onlookers can say, after the Mayday march, as in the verses of the poet: "Once more, thanks to Christ and to the police chief, we have had no trouble".

When social unrest rumbles more threateningly, the bourgeois state begins to show its power by taking measures to maintain order. A technical police expression gives a good idea of the use of potential violence: "the police and the troops are standing by". This means that there is no street fighting yet, but that if the bourgeois order and the bosses' "rights" were threatened the armed forces would leave their quarters and open fire.

The revolutionary critique has never let itself be hypnotised by the appearances of civility and serene equilibrium of the bourgeois order. It long ago established that even in the most democratic republic the political state constitutes the executive committee of the ruling class; and thus it decisively demolished the stupid theories which would have us believe that after the destruction of the old feudal, clerical and autocratic state a new form of state arises in which, thanks to elective democracy, all the elements of society, whatever their economic condition may be, are represented and protected with equal rights. The political state, even and primarily that representative and parliamentary one, constitutes an apparatus of oppression. It can be compared to an energy reservoir which stores the forces of domination of the economically privileged class. This reservoir is such that these forces are kept in the potential state in situations where social revolt does not near the point of exploding, but it unleashes them in the form of police repression and bloody violence as soon as revolutionary tremors rise from the social depths.

This is the sense of the classical analysis of Marx and Engels on the relationship between society and state, or in other words between social classes and the state. All attempts to shake this fundamental point of the proletariat's class doctrine have been crushed in the restoration of the revolutionary principles carried out by Lenin, Trotsky and the Communist International



immediately after World War I.

There is no scientific sense in establishing the existence of a quantum of potential energy if it is not possible to foresee that, in subsequent situations, it will be liberated in the kinetic state. Likewise the Marxist definition of the character of the bourgeois political state would remain meaningless and inconsistent if it did not conform to the certainty that in the culminating phase this organ of power of capitalism will inevitably unleash all its resources in the kinetic state against the eruption of the proletarian revolution.

Moreover, the equivalent of the Marxist thesis on the increase of poverty, and on the accumulation and concentration of capital could, in the sphere of politics, be nothing other than the concentration and increase of the energy contained within the state apparatus. In fact once the deceitfully peaceful phase of capitalist era had been closed with the outburst of the war of 1914 and with the economic characteristics evolving towards monopoly and towards the active intervention of the state in the economy and in the social struggles, it became evident – above all in the classical analysis of Lenin – that the political state of bourgeois regimes was taking on more and more decided forms of strict domination and police oppression. We have established in other works that the third and most modern phase of capitalism is economically defined as monopolist, introducing economic planning, and politically defined as totalitarian and fascist.

When the first fascist regimes appeared they were considered in the more immediate and commonplace interpretations as a restriction and an abolition of the so-called parliamentary and legal “guaranteed” rights. In actuality it was simply a question, in certain countries, of a passage of the political energy of domination of the capitalist class from the potential state to the kinetic state.

It was clear to every follower of the Marxist perspective – a perspective defined as catastrophic by the stupid castrators of that doctrine’s revolutionary strength – that the increasing severity of the class antagonisms would move the conflicts of economic interests to the level of an erupting revolutionary attack launched by the proletarian organisations against the citadel of capitalist state, and that the latter would uncover its artillery and engage in the supreme struggle for its survival.

In certain countries and in certain situations, for example in Italy in 1922 and in Germany in 1933, the tensions of the social relations, the instability of capitalist economic fabric and the crisis of the state apparatus itself due to the war became so acute that the ruling class could see that the inevitable moment was at hand where, with all the lies of democratic propaganda being exhausted, the only solution was the violent clash between the antagonistic social classes.

Then there occurred what was correctly defined as a capitalists’ offensive. Until then the bourgeois class, with its economic exploitation in vigorous development, had seemed to have been slumbering behind the apparent kindliness and tolerance of its representative and

parliamentary institutions. Having succeeded in mastering a very significant degree of historical strategy, it broke the hesitations and took the initiative, thinking that rather than a supreme defence of the state's fortress against the assault of revolution (which, according to Marx's and Lenin's teaching, does not aim at taking over the state but at totally smashing it) it was preferable to launch an offensive action aiming at the destruction of the bases of the proletarian organisation.

Thus a situation which was clearly foreseen in the revolutionary perspective was accelerated to a certain extent. In effect, Marxist communists have never thought that it was possible to carry out their program without this supreme clash between the opposing class forces; and moreover, the analysis of the most recent evolution of capitalism and of the monstrous enlargement of its state machineries with their enormous framework clearly indicated that such a development was inevitable.

The great error of judgement, tactics, and strategy which favoured the victory of the counter-revolution was that of deploring capitalism's powerful shift from the democratic hypocrisy to open violence, as if it was a movement that could be historically reversed. Instead of counterposing to this movement the necessity of the destruction of capitalist power, one counterposed instead the stupid pacifist pretension that capitalism would go in reverse, backwards along its path, in a direction opposite to the one which we Marxists have always ascribed to it, and that for the personal convenience of some cowardly rogue politicians, capitalism would be kind enough not to unsheathe its class weapons and return to the inconsistent and obsolete position of mobilisation without war which constituted the "pleasant" aspect of the previous period.

The basic mistake is to have been astonished, to have whined or to have deplored that the bourgeoisie carried out its totalitarian dictatorship without mask, whereas we knew very well that this dictatorship had always existed, that the state apparatus had always had, potentially if not in actuality, the specific function of wielding, preserving and defending the power and privilege of the bourgeois minority against revolution. The error consisted in preferring a bourgeois democratic atmosphere to a fascist one; in shifting the battle front from the perspective of the proletarian conquest of power to that of an illusory restoration of a democratic method of capitalist government in the place of the fascist one.

The fatal mistake was of not understanding that in any case the eve of the revolution which had been awaited for so many decades would reveal a bourgeois state drawn up for the armed defence against the proletarian advance, and that therefore such a situation must appear as a progress, and not as a regression, in comparison with the years of apparent social peace and of limited impetus from the class force of the proletariat. The damage done to the development of the revolutionary energies and to the prospects of the realisation of a socialist society does not stem from the fact that the bourgeoisie organised in a fascist form is supposedly more powerful

and more efficient in defending its privilege than a bourgeoisie still organised in a democratic form. Its class power and energy is the same in both cases. In the democratic phase it is in its potential state: over the muzzle of the cannon there is the innocuous protection of a covering. In the fascist phase energy is manifested in the kinetic state: the hood is taken off and the shot is fired. The defeatist and idiotic request which the traitorous leaders of the proletariat make to exploitative and oppressive capitalism is that it put back the deceitful covering over the muzzle of the weapon. If this were done the efficiency of the domination and exploitation would not have diminished but only increased thanks to the revitalised expedient of legalistic deception.

Since it would be even more insane to ask the enemy to disarm, we must gladly welcome the fact that, compelled by the urgencies of the situation, it unveils its own weapons, for then these weapons will be less difficult to face and to defeat.

Therefore the bourgeois regime of open dictatorship is an inevitable and predicted phase of the historical life of capitalism and it will not die without having gone through this phase. To fight to postpone this unmasking of the energies of the antagonistic social classes, to carry on a vain and rhetorical propaganda inspired by a stupid horror of dictatorship in principle, all this work can only favour the survival of capitalist regime and the prolonged subjection and oppression of the working class.



And with just as much certainty we can conclude the following, though it is quite likely to cause an uproar from all the geese of the bourgeois left: the comparison between the democratic phase of capitalism and the totalitarian phase shows that the amount of class oppression is greater in the first (although it is obvious that the ruling class always tends to choose the method which is more useful for its conservation). Fascism undoubtedly unleashes a greater mass of police and repressive violence, including bloody repression. But this aspect of kinetic energy primarily and gravely affects the very few authentic leaders and revolutionary militants of the working class movement, together with a stratum of middle bourgeois professional politicians who pretend to be progressive and friends of the working class, but who are nothing but the militia specially trained by the capitalists for use in the periods of the parliamentary comedy. Those who do not change their style and their costume in time are ousted with a kick in the ass – which is the main reason for their outcries.

As for the mass of the working class, it continues to be exploited as it has always been in the economic field. And the vanguard elements which form within the class for the assault against the present regime continue as always to receive – as soon as they take the correct anti-legalistic way of action – the lead which is reserved for them even by the bourgeois democratic governments. This we can see in countless examples, on the part of the republicans in France in

1848 and 1871, on the part of Social Democrats in Germany in 1919, etc.

But the new method introducing planning in the management of capitalist economy – which in relation to the antiquated unlimited classical liberalism of the past constitutes a form of self-limitation of capitalism – leads to a levelling of the extortion of surplus value around an average. The reformist measures which the right-wing socialists had advocated for many decades are adopted. In such a way the sharpest and extreme edges of capitalist exploitation are eased, while forms of public assistance develop.

All this aims at delaying the crises of class conflicts and the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. But undoubtedly it would be impossible to reach this aim without having succeeded in reconciling, to a certain degree, the open repression against the revolutionary vanguard with a relief of the most pressing economic needs of the great masses. These two aspects of the historical drama in which we live are a condition for one another. Churchill in his latter days said with good reason to the Labourites: you won't be able to found a state-run economy without a police state. More interventions, more regulations, more controls, more police. Fascism consists of the integration of artful social reformism with the open armed defence of state power.

Not all the examples of fascism are at the same level. Nevertheless the German one, as pitiless in the elimination of its enemies as one may say, has achieved a very high average standard of living economically speaking and an administration that technically was excellent, and when it has imposed war restrictions these even fell on the propertied classes and this to an unprecedented extent.

Therefore, even though bourgeois class oppression, in the totalitarian phase, increases the proportion of the kinetic use of violence with respect to the potential one, the total pressure on the proletariat does not increase but diminishes. It is precisely for this reason that the final crisis of the class struggle historically undergoes a delay.

The death of revolutionary energies lies in class collaboration. Democracy is class collaboration through lots of talk, fascism is plain class collaboration in fact. We are living in the midst of this latter historical phase. The rekindling of the class struggle will dialectically arise from a later phase, but for the time being let us establish that it cannot proceed through rallying the working classes behind the slogan of the return to liberalism, in which they have nothing to gain, not even relatively.

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This section deals mainly with the use of force, violence and dictatorship by the ruling

classes. It does not exhaust the subject of the use of these energies by the proletariat in the struggle for the conquest of power and in the exercise of power, an important question that will be reserved for following sections. But still remaining within the field of the study of the bourgeois forms of dictatorship, it would do well to specify that when we speak about the fascist, totalitarian and dictatorial capitalist method we always refer to collective organisations and actions. We do not see the prevailing factor of the historical scene to be individual dictators, who so greatly occupy the attention of a public that has been artfully enthralled, whether it is by their supporters or their adversaries.

During the last world war, two of the Big Three have been eliminated: Roosevelt and Churchill. But nothing has substantially changed in the course of events. We will leave Italy aside because here the examples of fascism and anti-fascism have had a very clownish character (the first models of an innovation always make one laugh, as the early automobiles which can be seen in a museum compared with a modern mass produced one). In Germany the person of Hitler represented a superfluous factor of the powerful Nazi organisation of forces. The Soviet regime will do very well without Stalin when his time has come. The other impressive machinery of domination, that of Japan, was based upon castes and classes without a personal leader.

We can escape from the overwhelming tide of lies which gorges modern public opinion only if we relentlessly drive away both the fetish of the individual as a protagonist of history, meaning not only the ordinary person, the man in the street, but also the one in the centre of the stage, the Leader, the Great Man.

That we live in an epoch of self-government of the peoples, not even the simpletons believe...

But we are not in the hands of a few great men either. We are in the hands of a very few great class Monsters, of the greatest states of the world, machines of domination whose enormous power weighs upon everybody and everything. Their open accumulation of potential energies foreshadows, in all corners of the earth, the kinetic use of immense and crushing forces when the conservation of the present institutions will require it. And these forces will be unleashed without the slightest hesitation on any side in the face of civil, moral and legal scruples, those ideal principles which are croaked about from morning till night by the infamous, purchased, hypocritical propagandas.

## **IV. Proletarian Struggle and Violence**

The first three parts of this article have briefly outlined the historical development of the class struggles up to present-day bourgeois society. They presented the perspective which Marxist socialism has long given on this subject but which nevertheless continues to be an object of

deviation and confusion.

To clarify the question we made the fundamental distinction between energy in the potential state (energy which is capable of entering into action but is not yet acting) and energy in the actual or kinetic state (energy which has already been set into motion and is producing its various effects). We explained the nature of this distinction in the physical world and extended it in a very simple way to the field of organic life and human society.

The problem was then to identify this energy, i.e. violence and coercive force, in the events of social life. We have emphasised that this is operating not only when there is a brutal physical act against the human body such as physical restraint, beating, and killing, but also in that much larger field where the actions of individuals are coerced through the simple threat and under the penalty of violence. This coercion arises inseparably with the first forms of collective productive activity and thus of what is considered to be civilised and political society. Coercion is an indispensable factor in the development of the whole course of history and in the development of the successive institutions and classes. The question is not to exalt or condemn it, but to recognise and consider it in the context of the different historical epochs and the various situations.

The second section compared feudal society with bourgeois capitalist society. Its aim was to illustrate the thesis, which of course is not new, that the passage from feudalism to capitalism – an event fundamental in the evolution of the technology of production as well as in the evolution of the economy – has not been accompanied by a decrease in the use of force, violence, and social oppression.

For Marx, the capitalist form of economy and society is the most antagonistic that history has presented until now. In its birth, its development, and its resistance against its own destruction, capitalism reaches a level of exploitation, persecution, and human suffering unknown before. This level is so high in quality and quantity, in potential and mass, in severity and range and – if we translate it into the ethical-literary terms which are not ours – in ferocity and immensity, that it has reached the masses, the peoples, and the races of all corners of the earth.

Finally the third section dealt with the comparison between the liberal-democratic and the fascist- totalitarian forms of bourgeois rule, showing that it is an illusion to consider the first to be less oppressive and more tolerant than the second. If we take into consideration not violence as it is openly manifested, but instead the actual potential of the modern state apparatuses, that is to say their ability and capacity to resist all antagonistic, revolutionary assaults, we can easily substitute the blind common-place present-day attitude, one that rejoices because two world wars supposedly drove back the forces of reaction and tyranny, and replace it by the obvious and clear verification that the capitalist system has more than doubled its strength, a strength concentrated in the great state monsters and in the world Leviathan of class rule now being

constructed. Our proof of this is not based on an examination of the juridical hypocrisy or of the written or oratorical demagoguery of today, which anyway are more revolting than they were under the defeated regimes of the Axis powers. Instead it is based on the scientific calculation of the financial, military, and police forces, in the measurement of the frantic accumulation and concentration of private or public, but always bourgeois, capital.

In comparison to 1914, 1919, 1922, 1933, and 1943, the capitalist regime of 1947 weighs down more, always more, in its economic exploitation and in its political oppression of the working masses and of everyone and everything that crosses its path. This is true for the “Great Powers” after their totalitarian suppression of the German and Japanese state machines. It is also and no less true even for the Italian state: although defeated, derided, forced into vassalage, saleable and sold in all direction, it is nevertheless more armed with police and more reactionary now than under Giolitti and Mussolini, and it will be even more reactionary if it passes from the hands of De Gasperi<sup>[1]</sup> to those of the left parties.

Having summarised the first three parts, we must now deal with the question of the use of force and violence in the social struggle when these methods of action are taken up by the revolutionary class of the present epoch, the modern proletariat.

In the course of about a century, the method of class struggle has been accepted in words by so many and such various movements and schools that the most widely differing interpretations have clashed in violent polemics, reflecting the ups and downs and the turning points of the history of capitalism and of the antagonisms to which it gives rise.

The polemic has been clarified in a classic way in the period between World War I and the Russian Revolution. Lenin, Trotsky, and the left-wing communist groups<sup>[2]</sup> who gathered in Moscow’s International settled the questions of force, violence, the conquest of power, the state, and the dictatorship in a way we must consider as definitive on the theoretical and programmatic level.

Opposed to them were the countless deformations of social-democratic opportunism. It is not necessary to repeat our refutation of these positions but it is useful to simply recall some points which clarify the concepts which distinguish us. Moreover, many of these false positions, which were then trampled to the ground and which seemed to have been dispersed forever, have reappeared in almost identical forms in the working class movement today.

Revisionism pretended to show that the prediction of a revolutionary clash between the working class and the defensive network of bourgeois power was an obsolete part of the Marxist system. Falsifying and exploiting the Marxist texts (in this case a famous preface and letter of Engels)<sup>[3]</sup> it maintained that the progress of military technology precluded any perspective of a victorious armed insurrection. It claimed instead that the working class would achieve power

very shortly through legal and peaceful means due to the development and strengthening of working class unions and of parliamentary political parties.

Revisionism sought to spread throughout the ranks of the working class the firm conviction that it was not possible to overthrow the power of the capitalist class by force and, furthermore, that it was possible to realise socialism after conquering the executive organs of the state by means of a majority in the representative institutions. Left Marxists were accused of a worship of violence, elevating it from a means to an end and invoking it almost sadistically even when it was possible to spare it and attain the same result in a peaceful way. But in the face of the eloquence of the historical developments this polemic soon unveiled its content. It was a mystique not so much of non-violence as it was an apology of the principles of the bourgeois order.

After the armed revolution triumphed in Leningrad over the resistance of both the Czarist regime and the Russian bourgeois class, the argument that it was not possible to conquer power with arms changed into the argument that it must not be done, even if it is possible. This was combined with the idiotic preaching of a general humanitarianism and social pacifism which of course repudiates the violence utilised for the victory of the working class revolutions, but does not denounce the violence used by the bourgeoisie for its historical revolutions, not even the extreme terroristic manifestations of this violence. Moreover, in all the controversial debates, in historical situations which were decisive for the socialist movement, when the right contested the propositions of direct action, it admitted that it would have agreed with the necessity of resorting to insurrection if it were for other objectives. For example, the Italian reformist socialists in May 1915 opposed the proposal for a general strike at the moment of war mobilisation, using ideological and political arguments in addition to a tactical evaluation of the relation of forces; but they admitted that if Italy intervened in the war on the side of Austria and Germany they would call the people to insurrection.

In the same way, those who theorise the “utilisation” of legal and democratic ways are ready to admit that popular violence is legitimate and necessary when there is an attempt from above to abolish constitutional rights. But in such a case how can it be explained that the development of military technology in the hands of the state is no longer an insurmountable obstacle? How can it be foreseen, in the event of a peaceful conquest of the majority, that the bourgeoisie will not use those military means in order to maintain power? How can the proletariat in these situations victoriously use the violence which is criticised and condemned as a class means? The social democrats cannot answer this because in doing so they would be obliged to confess that they are pure and simple accomplices in preserving bourgeois rule.

A system of tactical slogans such as theirs can in fact be reconciled only with a clearly anti-Marxist apology of bourgeois civilisation which precisely is the essence of the politics of those parties which have risen from the deformed trunk of anti-fascism.



The social-democratic thesis contends that the last historical situation where the recourse to violence and forms of civil war was necessary was precisely that situation which enabled the bourgeois order to rise from the ruins of the old feudal and despotic regimes. With the conquest of political liberties an era of civilised and peaceful struggles is supposedly opened in which all other conquests, such as economic and social equality, can be realised without further bloody conflicts.

According to this ignoble falsification, the historical movement of the modern proletariat and socialism are no longer the most radical battle of history. They are no longer the destruction of an entire world down to its foundations, from its economic framework and its legal and political system to its ideologies still impregnated with all the lies transmitted by previous forms of oppression and still poisoning even the very air we breathe.

Socialism is reduced to a stupid and irresolute combination of supposed legal and constitutional conquests by which the capitalist form has pretendedly enriched and enlightened society and vague social postulates which can be grafted and transplanted onto the trunk of the bourgeois system.

Marx measured the irresistible and increasing pressures in the social depths which will cause the mantle of the bourgeois forms of production to explode, just as geological cataclysms break the crust of the planet. His formidable historical vision of social antagonisms is replaced by the contemptible deception of a Roosevelt who adds to the short list of bourgeois liberties those of freedom from fear and freedom from need, or of a Pius XII who, after blessing once again the eternal principle of property in its modern capitalist form, pretends to weep over the abyss which exists between the poverty of the multitude and the monstrous accumulations of wealth.

Lenin's theoretical restoration of the revolutionary doctrine re-established the definition of the state as a machine which one social class uses to oppress other classes. This definition above all is fully valid for the modern bourgeois, democratic, and parliamentary state. But as a crowning point of the historical polemic, it must be made clear that the proletarian class force cannot take over this machine and use it for its own purposes; instead of conquering it, it must smash it and break it to pieces.

The proletarian struggle is not a struggle that takes place within the state and its organs but a struggle outside the state, against it, and against all its manifestations and forms.

The proletarian struggle does not aim at seizing or conquering the state as if it were a fortress which the victorious army seeks to occupy. Its aim instead is to destroy it and to raze its defeated defences and fortifications to the ground.

Yet after the destruction of the bourgeois state a form of political state becomes necessary, i.e. the new organised class power of the proletariat. This is due to the necessity of directing the use

of an organised class violence by means of which the privileges of capital are rooted out and the organisation of the freed productive forces in the new, non-private, non-commodity communist forms is made possible.

Consequently it is correct to speak of the conquest of power, meaning a non-legal, non-peaceful, but violent, armed, revolutionary conquest. It is correct to speak of the passage of power from the hands of the bourgeoisie to those of the proletariat precisely because our doctrine considers power not only authority and law based on the weight of the tradition of the past but also the dynamics of force and violence thrust into the future, sweeping away the barriers and obstacles of institutions. It would not be exact to speak of the conquest of the state or the passage of the state from the administration of one class to that of another precisely because the state of a ruling class must perish and be shattered as a condition for the victory of the formerly subjected class. To violate this essential point of Marxism, or to make the slightest concession to it (for instance allowing the possibility that the passage of power can take place within the scope of a parliamentary action, even one accompanied by street fighting and battles, and by acts of war between states) leads to the utmost conservatism. This is because such a concession is tantamount to conceding that the state structure is a form which is opened to totally different and opposed contents and therefore stands above the opposing classes and their historical conflict. This can only lead to the reverential respect of legality and the vulgar apology for the existing order.

It is not only a question of an error of scientific evaluation but also of a real degenerative historical process which took place before our eyes. It is this process which has led the ex-communist parties down hill, turning their backs on Lenin's theses and arriving at the coalition with the social-democratic traitors, the "Sworwer's government", and then the democratic government, that is to say a direct collaboration with the bourgeoisie and at its service.

With the unequivocally clear thesis of the destruction of the state, Lenin re-established the thesis of the establishment of the proletarian state. The second thesis does not please the anarchists who, though they had the merit of advancing the first, had the illusion that immediately after bourgeois power was smashed society could dispense with all forms of organised power and therefore with the political state, that is to say with a system of social violence. Since the transformation of the economy from private to socialist cannot be instantaneous, it follows that the elimination of the non-labouring class cannot be instantaneous and cannot be accomplished through the physical elimination of its members. Throughout the far from brief period during which the capitalist economic forms persist while constantly diminishing, the organised revolutionary state must function, which means – as Lenin unhypocritically said – maintaining soldiers, police forces, and prisons.

With the progressive reduction of the sector of the economy still organised in private forms,

there is a corresponding reduction of the area in which it is necessary to use political coercion, and the state tends to progressively disappear.

The points which we have recalled here in a schematic way are enough to demonstrate how both a magnificent polemical campaign ridiculing and crushing its opponents and, above all, how the greatest event up to now in the history of the class struggle have brought out in all their clarity the classical theses of Marx and Engels, the Communist Manifesto, and the conclusions which have been drawn from the defeat of the Paris Commune. These are the theses of the conquest of political power, the proletarian dictatorship, the despotic intervention in the bourgeois relationships of production, and the final withering away of the state. The right of speaking of historical confirmations parallel to the brilliant theoretical construction seems to cease when this last phase is attained since we have not yet witnessed – in Russia or anywhere else – the process of the withering away, the dying down of itself, the dissolving away (*Auflösung* in Engels) of the state. The question is important and difficult since a sound dialectic can demonstrate nothing with certainty on the basis of a more or less brilliant series of spoken or written words. Conclusions can only be based on facts.

The bourgeois states, in whatever atmospheres and ideological climates, inflate in a more and more terrible way before our eyes. The only state which [in 1947 – Ed.] is presented, through tremendous propaganda, as a working class state, expands its apparatus and its bureaucratic, legal, police, and military functions beyond all limits.

So it is not surprising that the prediction of the shrivelling up and elimination of the state, after it has fulfilled its decisive role in the class struggle, is greeted with a widespread scepticism.

Common opinion seems to say to us: “You can always wait, you who theorise even red dictatorships! The state organ, like a tumour in the body of society, will not regress and will instead invade all its tissues and all its innermost recesses until suffocating it”. It is this commonplace attitude which encourages all the individualist, liberal, and anarchist ideologies, and even the old and new deformed hybrids between the class method and the liberal one, all of which are served to us by socialisms based on nothing less than the personality and on the plenitude of its manifestation.

It is quite remarkable that even the few groups in the communist camp which reacted to the opportunist degeneration of the parties of the now dissolved International of Moscow, tend to display a hesitation on this point. In their preoccupation with fighting against the suffocating centralisation of the Stalinist bureaucracy, they have been led to cast doubts on the Marxist principles re-established by Lenin, and they reveal they believe that Lenin – and along with him all the revolutionary communists in the glorious period of 1917-20 – were guilty of an idolisation of the state.

We must firmly and clearly state that the current of the Italian Marxist left, with which this review is linked, does not have the slightest hesitance or repentance on this point. It rejects any revision of Marx and Lenin's fundamental principle that the revolution, as it is a violent process par excellence, is thus a highly authoritarian, totalitarian, and centralising act.

Our condemnation of the Stalinist orientation is not based on the abstract, scholastic, and constitutionalist accusation that it committed the sinful acts of abusing bureaucracy, state intervention, and despotic authority. It is based instead on quite different evaluations, i.e. the economic, social, and political development of Russia and the world, of which the monstrous swelling of the state machine is not the sinful cause but the inevitable consequence.

The hesitation about accepting and defending the dictatorship is rooted not only in vague and stupid moralising about the pretended right of the individual or the group not to be pressured by or forced to yield to a greater force, but also in the distinction – undoubtedly very important – made between the concept of a dictatorship of one class over another and the relationships of organisation and power within the working class which constitutes the revolutionary state.

With this point we have reached the aim of the present article. Having restated the basic facts in their correct terms, we of course do not pretend to have exhausted these questions, which is something that only history can do (as we consider it to have done with the question of the necessity of violence in the conquest of power). The task of the party's theoretical work and militancy is something other: it is to avoid, in the search for a solution to these questions, the unconscious utilisation of arguments which are dictated or influenced by enemy ideologies, and thus by the interests of the enemy class.

Dictatorship is the second and dialectical aspect of revolutionary force. This force, in the first phase of the conquest of power, acts from below and concentrates innumerable efforts in the attempts to smash the long-established state form. After the success of such an attempt, this same class force continues to act but in an opposite direction, i.e. from above, in the exercise of power entrusted to a new state body fully constituted in its whole and its parts and even more robust, more resolute and, if necessary, more pitiless and terroristic than that which was defeated.

The outcries against the call for the proletarian dictatorship (a claim that even the politicians of the iron Moscow regime are hypocritically hiding today) as well as the cries of alarm against the pretended impossibility of curbing the lust for power and consequently for material privilege on the part of the bureaucratic personnel crystallised into a new ruling class or caste, all this corresponds to the vulgar and metaphysical position which treats society and the state as abstract entities. Such a position is incapable of finding the key to problems through an investigation into the facts of production and into the transformation of all relationships, which the collision between classes will give birth to.

Thus it is a banal confusion to equate the concept of dictatorship that we Marxists call for, with the vulgar conception of tyranny, despotism, and autocracy. The proletarian dictatorship is thus confused with personal power, and on the basis of the same stupidities, Lenin is condemned just like Hitler, Mussolini, or Stalin.

We must remember that the Marxist analysis completely disclaims the assertion that the state machines act under the impulse of the will of these contemporary “Duces”. These “Duces” are nothing but chessmen, having only symbolic importance, which are moved on the chessboard of history by forces from which they cannot escape.

Furthermore we have shown many times that the bourgeois ideologists do not have the right to be shocked by a Franco, a Tito, or the vigorous methods used by the states which present them as their leaders, since these ideologists do not hesitate to justify the dictatorship and terror to which the bourgeoisie resorted precisely in the period following its conquest of power. Thus no right-minded historian classifies the dictator of Naples in 1860, Giuseppe Garibaldi, as a political criminal but on the contrary exalts him as a true champion of humanity.

The proletarian dictatorship, therefore, is not manifested in the power of a man, even if he has exceptional personal qualities.

Does this dictatorship then have as its acting agent a political party which acts in the name and in the interests of the working class? Our current answers this question, today as well as at the time of the Russian Revolution, with an unconditional “yes”.

Since it is undeniable that the parties which pretend to represent the proletarian class have undergone profound crises and have repeatedly broken up or undergone splits, our decidedly affirmative answer raises the following question: is it possible to determine which party has in effect such a revolutionary prerogative, and what criterion is to be used to determine it? The question is thus transferred to the examination of the relationship between the broad class base and the more limited and well defined organ which is the party.

In answering the questions on this point we must not lose sight of the distinctive characteristic of the dictatorship. As is always the case with our method, before concrete historical events reveal the positive aspects of this dictatorship, we shall define it by its negative aspect.

A regime in which the defeated class still exists physically and constitutes from a statistical viewpoint a significant part of the social agglomerate but is kept outside of the state by force, is a dictatorship. Moreover this defeated class is kept in conditions which make it impossible to attempt a reconquest of power because it is denied the rights of association, propaganda, and the press.

It is not necessary to determine from the start who maintains the defeated class in this strict

state of subjugation: the very course of the historical struggle itself will tell us. Provided that the class we fight is reduced to this state of a social minority, undergoing this social death pending its statistical one, we will admit for a moment that the acting agent can be either the entire victorious social majority (an extreme hypothesis which is unrealisable), or a part of that majority, or a solid vanguard group (even if it is a statistical minority), or finally, in a brief crisis, even a single man (another extreme hypothesis, which was close to being realised in only one historical example – that of Lenin, who in April 1917, alone against the entire Central Committee and the old Bolsheviks, was able to read in advance in the march of events and to determine in his theses the new course of the history of the party and of the revolution, just as in November he had the Constituent Assembly dissolved by the Red Guard).

As the Marxist method is not a revelation, a prophecy, or a scholasticism, it achieves first of all the understanding of the way in which the historical forces act and determines their relationships and their collisions. Then, with theoretical research and practical struggle continuing, it determines the characteristics of the manifestation of these forces and the nature of the means by which they act.

The Paris Commune has confirmed that the proletarian forces must smash the old state instead of entering it and taking it over; its means must not be legality but insurrection.

The very defeat of the proletariat in that class battle and the October victory at Leningrad have shown that it is necessary to organise a new form of armed state whose “secret” is in the following: it denies political survival to the members of the defeated class and to all its various parties.

Once this decisive secret has been drawn from history, we still have not clarified and studied all the physiology and the dynamics of the new organ that has been produced. Unfortunately an extremely difficult area, its pathology, remains open.

Above all else the determining negative characteristic is the exclusion of the defeated class from the state organ (regardless of whether or not it has multiple institutions: the representative, executive, judicial and bureaucratic). This radically distinguishes our state from the bourgeois state which pretends to welcome all social strata in its bodies.

Yet this change cannot seem absurd to the defeated bourgeoisie. Once it succeeded in bringing down the old state based on two orders – the nobility and the clergy – it understood that it had made a mistake by only demanding to enter as the Third Estate in the new state body. Under the Convention and under the Terror it chased the aristocrats out of the state. It was easy for it to historically close up the phase of open dictatorship since the privileges of the two orders which were based on legal prerogatives rather than on the productive organisation could rapidly be destroyed and thereby the priest and the noble could rapidly be reduced to simple ordinary citizens.

In this article we have defined what fundamentally distinguishes the historical form of the proletarian dictatorship. In the next article of this series we will examine the relationship between the various organs and institutions through which the proletarian dictatorship is exercised: the class party, workers councils, unions, and factory councils.

In other words we will conclude by discussing the problem of the so-called proletarian democracy (an expression utilised by some texts of the Third International but which it would be good to eliminate) which is supposedly to be instituted after the dictatorship has historically buried bourgeois democracy.

## **V. The Degeneration of the Proletarian Power in Russia and the Question of the Dictatorship**

The difficult problem of the degeneration of the proletarian power can be summarised briefly. In a large country the working class conquered power following the program which called for armed insurrection and the annihilation of all influence of the defeated class through pressure of the proletarian class dictatorship. In the other countries of the world, however, the working class either did not have the strength to initiate the revolutionary attack or else was defeated in the attempt. In these countries, power remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie, and production and exchange continued according to the laws of capitalism which dominated all the relationships of the world market.

In the country where the revolution triumphed, the dictatorship held firm politically and militarily against every counter-attack. It brought the civil war to a close in a few short and victorious years, and foreign capitalism did not engage in a general action to crush it.

A process of internal degeneration of the new political and administrative apparatus began to develop however. A privileged circle began to form, monopolising the advantages and posts in the bureaucratic hierarchy while continuing to claim to represent the interests of the great labouring masses.

In the other countries, the revolutionary working class movement, which was intimately linked to this same political hierarchy, not only did not succeed in the victorious overthrow of the bourgeois states, but progressively lost and distorted the whole sense of its own action by pursuing other non-revolutionary objectives.



This terrible problem in the history of the class struggle gives rise to a crucial question: how

can such a double catastrophe be prevented? The question actually is badly posed. For those who follow the determinist method the question actually is one of determining the true characteristics and laws of this degenerative process, in order to establish when and how we can recognise the conditions which would allow us to expect and pursue a revolutionary course free from this pathological reversion.

Here we will not concern ourselves with refuting those who deny the existence of such a degeneration and who maintain that in Russia there is a true revolutionary working class power, an actual evolution of the economic forms towards communism, and a coordination with the other proletarian parties of the world which will actually lead to the overthrow of world capitalism.

Nor will we concern ourselves here with a study of the socio-economic aspects of the problem, for this would necessitate a detailed and careful analysis of the mechanism of production and distribution in Russia and of the actual relationships which Russia has with foreign capitalist economies.

Instead, at the end of this historical exposition on the question of violence and force, we will respond to those who claim that such an oppressive and bureaucratic degeneration is a direct consequence of infringing and violating the cannons and principles of elective democracy.

This democratic critique has two aspects, with the less radical being in fact the more insidious. The first is overtly bourgeois and is directly linked to the entire world campaign to defame the Russian Revolution. This campaign, which has been going on since 1917, has been led by all the liberals, democrats and social democrats of the world who have been terrorised as much by the magnificent and courageous theoretical proclamation of the method of the proletarian dictatorship as by its practical application.

After everything that has been said we will consider this first aspect of the democratic lamentation to have been refuted. The struggle against it, however, still remains of primary importance today since the conformist demand of what Lenin called “democracy in general” (and which in the basic communist works represents the dialectical opposite, the antithesis of the revolutionary position) is still disgustingly paraded by the very parties who claim to be linked to the present regime in Russia. This very regime, although making dangerous and condemnable concessions to the bourgeois democratic mechanism at home in the area of formal rights, not only continues to be but becomes increasingly a strictly totalitarian and police state.

Therefore we can never insist enough on our critique of democracy in all the historical forms in which it has appeared until now. Democracy has always been an internal method of organisation of the oppressor class, whether this class is old or new. It has always been a technique, whether old or new, that is utilised in the internal relations among the elements and groups of the exploiting class. In the bourgeois revolutions it was also the necessary and vital



environment for the emergence of capitalism.

The old democracies were based on electoral principles, assemblies, parliaments or councils. While deceitfully pretending that their aim was to realise a well-being for all and the extension of the spiritual or material conquests to all of society, their actual function was to enforce and maintain the exploitation of a mass of heathens, slaves and helots, of whole peoples who had been oppressed because they were less advanced or less war-like, and of a whole mass who had been excluded from the temple, the senate, the city and the assemblies.

We can see the reality of the multitude of banal theories based on the principle of egalitarianism: it is the compromise, agreement, and conspiracy among the members of the privileged minority to the detriment of the lower classes. Our appraisal of the modern democratic form, which is based on the holy charter of the British, French, and American revolutions, is no different. Modern democracy is a technique which provides the best political conditions for the capitalist oppression and exploitation of the workers. It replaces the old network of feudal oppression by which capitalism itself was suffocated, but only to exploit in a way which is new and different, but no less intense or extensive.

Our interpretation of the present totalitarian phase of the bourgeois epoch is fundamental in regard to this point. In this phase the parliamentary forms, having played out their role, tend to disappear and the atmosphere of modern capitalism becomes anti-liberal and anti-democratic. The tactical consequence of this correct evaluation is that any call to return to the old bourgeois democracy characteristic of rising capitalism is opposed to the interests of the working class; it is reactionary and even “anti-progressive”.



We will now take up the second aspect of the democratic critique. This aspect is not inspired by the dogmas of an inter-class and above-class democracy but instead says basically the following: it is well and good to establish the proletarian dictatorship and to do away with any scruples in the repression of the rights of the defeated bourgeois minority; however once the bourgeoisie in Russia was deprived of all rights, the degeneration of the proletarian state occurred because the rules of representation were violated “within” the working class. If an elective system truly functioning according to the majority principle had been established and respected in the base organisations of the proletariat (the soviets, the unions and the political party), with every decision made on the basis of the numerical outcome of a “truly free” vote, then the true revolutionary path would have been automatically maintained and it would have been possible to ward off any degeneration and any danger of the abusive, suffocating domination by the ignoble “Stalinist clique”.

At the heart of this widely accepted viewpoint is the idea that each individual, solely due to the fact that he or she belongs to an economic class (i.e. that he finds himself in particular relationships in common with many others with respect to production) is consequently predisposed to acquire a clear class “consciousness”, in other words to acquire that body of ideas and understandings which reflect the interests, the historical path and the future of his class. This is a false way of understanding Marxist determinism because the formation of consciousness is something which, although certainly linked to the basic economic conditions, lags behind them at a great distance in time and has a field of action that is much more restricted.

For example, many centuries before the development of the historical consciousness of the bourgeois class, the bourgeois, the tradesman, the banker, and the small manufacturer existed and fulfilled essential economic functions, but had the mentality of servants and accomplices of the feudal lords. A revolutionary tendency and ideology slowly formed among them however and an audacious minority began to organise itself in order to attempt to conquer power.

Just as it is true that some members of the aristocracy fought for the bourgeois revolution, it is also true that there were many members of the bourgeoisie who, after the conquest of power in the great democratic revolutions, not only retained a way of thinking but also a course of action contrary to the general interests of their own class, and militated and fought with the counter-revolutionary party.

Similarly, while the opinions and consciousness of the worker are formed under the influence of his or her working and material living conditions, they are also formed in the environment of the whole traditional conservative ideology in which the capitalist world envelopes the worker.

This conservative influence is becoming increasingly stronger in the present period. It is not necessary to list again the resources which are available not only for the systematic organisation of propaganda through modern techniques, but also for the actual centralised intervention in economic life through the adoption of numerous reformist measures and state intervention which are intended to satisfy certain secondary needs of the workers and which in fact often have a concrete effect on their economic situation.

For the crude and uneducated masses, the old aristocratic and feudal regimes needed only the church to fabricate servile ideologies. They acted on the rising bourgeoisie, however, primarily through their monopoly over the school and culture. The young bourgeoisie was consequently compelled to sustain a great and complex ideological struggle which the literature presents as a struggle for the freedom of thought but which in fact concerned the superstructure and a fierce conflict between two forces who were organised to defeat one another.

Today world capitalism in addition to the church and schools, disposes of an endless number of other forms of ideological manipulation and countless methods for forming a so-called

“consciousness”.

It surpasses the old regimes, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in the fabrication of falsehoods and deceptions. This is true not only in that it broadcasts the most absurd doctrines and superstitions but also in that it informs the masses in a totally false way about the countless events in the complexity of modern life.

In spite of this tremendous arsenal of our class enemy we have always maintained that within the oppressed class an antagonistic ideology and doctrine would form and would achieve a greater and greater clarity as the economic development itself sharpens the conflict between the productive forces and the relations of production and as the fierce struggle between different class interests spreads. This perspective is not founded on the argument that given the fact that the proletarians outnumber the bourgeois, the sum total of their individual views and conceptions would prevail over that of the enemy due to their greater numerical weight.

We have always maintained that this clarity and consciousness is not realised in an amorphous mass of isolated individuals. It is realised instead in organisations which emerge from the undifferentiated mass, in resolute minorities who join together beyond national boundaries following the line of the general historical continuity of the movement. These minorities assume the function of leading the struggle of the masses; the greater part of the masses on the other hand are pushed into this struggle by economic factors well before they develop the same strength and clarity of ideas that is crystallised in the guiding party.

This is why a count of the votes cast by the entire working class mass (supposing such a thing were possible) would not exclude an outcome favourable to the counter-revolution even in a situation which would be conducive to a forward advance and a struggle under the leadership of the vanguard minority. Even a general and widespread political struggle which ends with the victorious conquest of power is not sufficient for the immediate elimination of the whole complex of traditional influences of bourgeois ideology. The latter not only continues to survive throughout the whole social structure within the country of the victorious revolution itself, but continues to act from outside with a massive deployment of all the modern means of propaganda of which we have spoken before.

It is, of course, of great advantage to break the state machinery, to destroy all the old structures for the systematic fabrication of bourgeois ideology (such as the church, the school and other countless associations) and to take control over all the major means of diffusing ideas, such as the press, the radio, the theatre, etc. However all this is not enough. It must be completed by a socio-economic condition: the rapid and successful eradication of the bourgeois form of production. Lenin was well aware that the necessity of permitting the continued existence (and in a certain sense the flourishing) of the family management of the small peasant farms meant that a whole area would be left open to the influence of the selfish and mercantile

bourgeois psychology, to the anti-revolutionary propaganda of the priest, and in short to the play of countless counter-revolutionary superstitions. The unfavourable relationship of forces, however, left no other choice. Only in conserving the force, strength and firmness of the armed power of the industrial proletariat was it possible to make use of the revolutionary impetus of the peasant allies against the shackles of the agrarian feudal regime and at the same time guard against the danger of a possible revolt by the middle peasants, such as occurred during the civil war under Denikin and Kolchak.

The erroneous position of those who want to see the application of arithmetic democracy within the working class, or within certain class organisations, can thus be traced back to a false appreciation of Marxist determinism.

We have already shown that it is incorrect to believe that in each historical period each of the opposing classes has corresponding groups which profess theories opposed to the other classes. Instead the correct thesis is that in each historical epoch the doctrinal system based on the interests of the ruling class tends to be professed by the oppressed class, much to the advantage of the former. He who is a slave in the body is also a slave in the mind. The old bourgeois lie is precisely to pretend that we must begin with the liberation of the intellect (a method which leads to nothing and costs nothing for the privileged class), while instead we must start with the physical liberation of the body.

It is also erroneous to establish the following progression of determinisms with respect to the famous problem of consciousness: influence of economic factors, class consciousness, class action. The progression instead is the reverse: influence of economic factors, class action, class consciousness. Consciousness comes at the end and, in general, after the decisive victory. Economic necessity unites and focuses the pressure and energy of all those who are oppressed and suffocated by the forms of a given productive system. The oppressed react, they fight, they hurl themselves against these forms. In the course of this clash and this battle they increasingly develop an understanding of the general conditions of the struggle as well as its laws and principles, and a clear comprehension of the program of the class struggle develops.

For decades we have been reproached for wanting a revolution carried out by those who are unconscious.

We could have responded that provided that the revolution sweeps away the mass of horrors created by the bourgeois regime and provided that the terrible encirclement of the productive masses by bourgeois institutions which oppress and suffocate them is broken, then it would not bother us in the least if the decisive blows were delivered even by those who are not yet conscious of the aim of the struggle.

Instead, we left Marxists have always clearly and emphatically insisted on the importance of theory in the working class movement, and we consequently have constantly denounced the

absence of principles and the betrayal of these by the right opportunists. We have always maintained the validity of the Marxist conception which considers the proletariat even as the true inheritor of modern classical philosophy. Let us explain. The struggle of the bourgeois usurers, colonial settlers and merchants was paralleled by an attack by the critical method against the dogmas of the church and the ideology of the authority of divine right; there was a revolution which appeared to be completed in natural philosophy before it was completed in society. This resulted from the fact that, of those forms which had to be destroyed in order for the capitalist productive forces to develop, not the least difficult to break down was the scholastic and theocratic ideological system of the middle ages. However, after its political and social victory, the bourgeoisie became conservative. It had no interest in directing the weapon of the critique, which it had used against the lies of Christian cosmology, to the area of the much more pressing and human problem of the social structure. This second task in the evolution of the theoretical consciousness of society fell to a new class which was pushed by its own interests to lay bare the lies of bourgeois civilisation. This new class, in the powerful dialectical vision of Marx, was the class of the "wretched artisans", excluded from culture in the middle ages and supposedly elevated to a position of legal equality by the liberal revolution; it was the class of manual labourers of big industry, uneducated and all but illiterate.

The key to our conception lies precisely in the fact that we do not consider the seat of consciousness to be the narrow area of the individual person and that we well know that, generally speaking, the elements of the mass who are pushed into struggle cannot possess in their minds the general theoretical outlook. To require such a condition would be purely illusory and counter-revolutionary. Neither does this task of elaborating the theoretical consciousness fall to a band or group of superior individuals whose mission is to help humanity. It falls instead to an organism, to a mechanism differentiated within the mass, utilising the individual elements as cells that compose the tissue and elevating them to a function made possible only by this complex of relationships. This organism, this system, this complex of elements each with its own function, (analogous to the animal organism with its extremely complicated systems of tissues, networks, vessels, etc.) is the class organism, the party, which in a certain way defines the class faced with itself and gives the class the capacity to make its own history.

This whole process is reflected in the most diverse ways with respect to the different individuals who statistically belong to the class. To be more specific, we are not surprised to find side by side in a given situation the revolutionary and conscious worker, the worker who is still a total victim of the conservative political influences and who perhaps even marches in the ranks of the enemy, the worker who follows the opportunist currents of the movement, etc.

And we would have no conclusions to automatically draw from a vote among the working class that would indicate the following of each of these various positions - assuming that such a vote was actually possible.



It is only too well established that the class party, both before and after the conquest of power, is susceptible of degeneration in its function as a revolutionary instrument. It is necessary to search both for the causes of this serious phenomenon of social pathology and for the means to fight it. However it only follows from what has been said above that the method of voting cannot guarantee the correctness of the Party's orientation and directives, regardless of whether this voting is done by militants of the party or by a much wider circle encompassing the workers who belong to the unions, the factory organisations or even the representative organs of a political nature, such as the soviets or workers councils.

The history of the working class movement shows concretely that such a method has never led to any good and has never prevented the disastrous victories of opportunism. In all the conflicts between tendencies within the traditional socialist parties before World War I, the right-wing revisionists always argued against the radical Marxists of the left that they (the right wing) were much more closely tied to the wide strata of the working class than the narrow circle of the leadership of the political party. The opportunist currents had their main support in the parliamentary leaders of the party who disobeyed the party's political directives and demanded a free hand to collaborate with the bourgeois parties. They did so under the pretext that they had been elected by the mass of proletarian voters who far outnumbered the proletarians who belonged to the party and elected the party's political leadership. The union leaders who belonged to the party practised the same collaboration on the union level as the parliamentary leaders did on the political level. They refused the discipline of the class party, using the justification that they represented all the unionised workers who greatly outnumbered the party's militants. In their haste to ally with capitalism (something which culminated in their support for the first imperialist war) neither the parliamentary possibilists nor the union bureaucrats hesitated, in the name of the workerism and labourism they proudly flaunted, to deride those groups who brought forwards the true class politics within the party and to brand these groups as intellectuals and sometimes even as non-proletarians.

The history of Sorelian syndicalism also shows that the method of direct representation of the rank and file worker does not have left results and does not lead to the preservation of a truly revolutionary orientation. At a certain period this school of anarcho-syndicalism had seemed to some to be a true alternative to the degeneration of the social-democratic party which had taken the road of renouncing direct action and class violence. The Marxist groups which later converged in the Leninist reconstruction of the Third International rightly criticised and condemned this seemingly radical orientation. They denounced it for abandoning the only unifying class method which could surmount the narrowness of the individual trade and of the everyday conflicts limited to economic demands. Even if physically violent means of struggle were used, this orientation leads to the denial of the position of revolutionary Marxism, because

for Marxism every class struggle is a political struggle and the indispensable instrument of this struggle is the party.

The justness of this theoretical polemic was confirmed by the fact that even revolutionary syndicalism sank in the crisis of the war and passed into the ranks of social patriotism in the various countries.

Now, in regards to the action of the party after the revolutionary victory, we will turn to the major episodes of the Russian Revolution which shed the greatest light and provide us with the best experience.

We reject the critique which claims that the disastrous degeneration of Leninist revolutionary politics into the present Stalinist policies was brought about in the beginning by the excessive predominance of the party and its central committee over the other working class organisations. We reject the illusory viewpoint that the whole degenerative process could have been contained if a vote among the various base organisations had been used as the means to decide both the make-up of the hierarchy and the major changes in the politics of the proletarian state. The problem of the degeneration cannot be comprehended without connecting it to the question of the socio-economic role of the various working class organs in the process of the destruction of the old economy and of the construction of the new.

Unions undoubtedly constitute and for a long period have constituted a basic area of struggle in the development of the revolutionary energy of the proletariat. But this has been possible with success only when the class party has carried on a serious work within the unions in order to shift the concentration of energy from narrow intermediate objectives to general class aims. The trade union, even as it evolved into the industrial union, finds limits to its dynamic because within it there exist different interests between the various categories and groups of workers. There are even greater limits to its action as capitalist society and the capitalist state pass through the three successive historical phases: the prohibition of trade organisations and strikes; the toleration of autonomous trade organisations; and finally the conquest of the trade unions and their imprisonment in the bourgeois system.

Even under a solidly established proletarian dictatorship, the union cannot be considered as an organ which represents the workers in a fundamental and stable way. In this social period conflicts between the various trades in the working class can still exist. The basic point is that the workers only have reason to make use of the union as long as the working class power is compelled to tolerate, in certain sections, the temporary presence of employers; with the disappearance of the latter due to the advance of socialist development, all content of union action is lost. Our conception of socialism is not the substitution of the state boss for the private boss. However if the relationship were such in the transition period, then in the supreme interests of revolutionary politics it could not be admitted as a principle that the employer state

must always give in to the economic pressure of the workers' unions.

We won't go further in this involved analysis, for at this point we have already sufficiently explained why we left Communists do not admit that the unionised mass would be allowed to exert an influence on revolutionary politics through a majority vote.

Now let us consider the factory councils. We must remember that this form of economic organisation, which at first appeared to be much more radical than the union, went on to lose always more its pretence of revolutionary dynamism; today the idea of factory councils is common to all political currents, even the fascists. The conception of factory councils as an organisation which participates first in the supervising and later the management of production, and in the end which is capable of taking over, factory by factory, the management of production in its totality, has proved to be totally collaborationist. It has proved to be another way, no less effective than the old syndicalism, of preventing the masses from being channelled in the direction of the great united and centralised struggle for power. The polemic surrounding this question caused a great stir in the young Communist parties when the Russian Bolsheviks were compelled to take firm and even drastic measures to combat the workers' tendency towards autonomous technical and economic management of the factories in which they worked. Such an autonomous management not only impeded the realisation of a true socialist plan but also had the danger of seriously harming the efficiency of the productive machinery – something the counter-revolutionaries were counting on. In fact the factory council, even more so than the union, can act as an exponent of very narrow interests which can come into conflict with the general class interests.

Consequently the factory councils also cannot be considered as a basic and definitive organ of the working class state. When a true communist economy is established in certain sectors of production and circulation – that is to say when we have gone far beyond the simple expulsion of the capitalist owner from industry and the management of the enterprise by the state – then it will be precisely an economy based on autonomous enterprises which have to have disappeared. Once we have gone beyond the mercantilist form of production, the local plant will only be a technical node in the great network guided rationally by a unitary plan. The firm will no longer have a balance sheet of income and expenditures; consequently it will no longer be a firm at all and the producer will no longer be a wage labourer. Thus the factory council, like the union, has natural limits of functioning which prevent it from being, up to the end the real field for class preparation where the proletariat can build its will and capacity to struggle until it completely achieves its final goal. This is the reason why these economic organisations cannot be a body which oversees the party holding state power and which judges whether or not the party has strayed from the basic historical path.

It remains for us to examine the new organisations which were brought to life by the Russian Revolution. These were the workers, peasants and, at the beginning, soldiers soviets.



Some claimed that this system represented a new proletarian constitutional form counterposed to the traditional constitutional forms of the bourgeois state. The soviet system reached from the smallest village to the highest bodies of the state through successive horizontal strata. Furthermore it had the two following characteristics: 1) it excluded all elements of the old propertied classes, in other words it was the organisational manifestation of the proletarian dictatorship, and 2) it concentrated all representative, executive and, in theory, even judicial powers in its nerve centres. It has been said that because of these characteristics the soviet system is a perfect mechanism of internal class democracy which, once discovered, would eclipse the traditional parliaments of bourgeois liberalism.

However, since the emergence of socialism from its utopian phase, every Marxist has known that the invention of a constitutional form is not enough to distinguish the great social forms and the great historical epochs. The constitutional structures are transitory reflections of the relationship of forces; they are not derived from universal principles from which we could deduce an inherent mode of state organisation.

Soviets in their essence are actual class organisations and are not, as some believed, conglomerations of trade or craft organisations. Consequently they do not suffer from the narrowness of the purely economic organisation. For us their importance lies above all in the fact that they are organs of struggle. We do not try to view them in terms of ideal structural models but in terms of the history of their real development.

Thus it was a decisive moment in the Russian Revolution when, shortly after the election of the Constituent Assembly, the soviets rose up against the latter as its dialectical opposite and Bolshevik power dissolved the parliamentary assembly by force. This was the realisation of the brilliant historical slogan "All Power to the Soviets".

However, all this was not sufficient for us to accept the idea that once such a form of class representation is born (and leaving aside here the fluctuations, in every sense, of its representative composition which we are not able to examine here), a majority vote, at whatever moment and turn in the difficult struggle waged by the revolution both domestically and externally is a reliable and easy method for solving every question and even avoiding the counter-revolutionary degeneration.

We must admit that the soviet system, due to the very complexity of its historical evolutionary cycle (which incidentally must end in the most optimistic hypothesis with the disappearance of the soviets along with the withering away of the state), is susceptible of falling under counter-revolutionary influence just as it is susceptible of being a revolutionary instrument. In conclusion, we do not believe that there is any constitutional form which can immunise us against such a danger – the only guarantee, if any, lies in the development of the domestic and international relations of social forces.

Since we want to establish the supremacy of the party, which includes only a minority of the class, over the other forms of organisation, it could be possible for someone to object that we seem to think that the party is eternal, in other words that it will survive the withering away of the state of which Engels spoke.

Here we do not want to go into a discussion on the future transformation of the party. Just as the state, in the Marxist definition, withers away and is transformed, from a political apparatus of coercion, into a large and always more rational technical administration, so the party evolves into a simple organisation for social research and study corresponding to the large institutions for scientific research in the new society.

The distinctive characteristic of the party follows from its organic nature. One does not join the party because one has a particular position in the economic or social structure. No one is automatically a party militant because he is a proletarian, a voter, a citizen, etc.

Jurists would say that one joins the party by free individual initiative. We Marxists say otherwise: one joins the party always due to factors born out of relationships of social environment, but these factors can be linked in a more general way to the characteristics of the class party, to its presence in all parts of the world, to the fact that it is made up of workers of all trades and enterprises and, in principle, even of those who are not workers, and to the continuity of its work through the successive stages of propaganda, organisation, physical combat, seizure of power, and the construction of a new order.

Out of all the proletarian organisations, it is consequently the political party which least suffers from those structural and functional limits which enable the anti-proletarian influences – the germs which cause the disease of opportunism – to force their way in. We have said many times, though, that this danger also exists for the party. The conclusion that we draw is not that it can be warded off by subordinating the party to the other organisations of that class which the party represents – a subordination which is often demanded under false pretexts, other times simply out of naivety with the reason that a greater number of workers belong to other class organisations.



Our conception of this question also concerns the supposed necessity of internal party democracy. We do not deny that there unfortunately have been numerous and disastrous examples of errors committed by the central leadership of the communist parties. However can these errors be avoided through computing the votes of the rank and file militants?

We do not attribute the degeneration which took place in the Communist Party to the fact that

the assemblies and congresses of the militants had little voice with respect to the initiatives taken by the centre.

At many historical turning points we have seen the rank and file smothered by the centre for counter- revolutionary purposes. To this end even the instruments of the state machine, including the most brutal, have been employed. But all this is not the origin of the degeneration of the party but an inevitable manifestation of it, a sign that the party has yielded to counter-revolutionary influences.

The position of the Italian Communist Left on what we could call “the question of revolutionary guarantees” was first of all that no constitutional or contractual provision can protect the party against degeneration even though the party, as opposed to the other organisations we have studied, has the characteristics of a contractual organisation (and we use the term not as it is used in jurisprudence nor even as it was used by J.J. Rousseau). At the base of the relationship between the militant and the party there is an obligation which, in order to rid ourselves of the undesirable adjective “contractual”, we can simply call a dialectical obligation. The relationship is double and flows in two directions: from the centre to the base and from the base to the centre. If the action of the centre goes in accordance with the good functioning of the dialectical relationship, it is met by healthy responses from the base.

The celebrated problem of discipline thus consists in establishing a system of limits for the base which is the proper reflection of the limits set for the action of the leadership. Consequently we have always maintained that the leadership must not have the right, in the great turning points in the political situation, to discover, invent and impose pretendedly new principles, new formulations and new guidelines for the action of the party. These sudden shifts make up the history of opportunism. When such a crisis occurs (and this can happen precisely because the party is not an immediate and automatic organisation) it is followed by an internal struggle, the formation of tendencies, and splits. In such a case these are useful developments, just as a fever, for freeing an organism of disease. Nevertheless, “constitutionally” they cannot be accepted, encouraged or tolerated.

There is no rule or recipe for preventing the party from falling into the crisis of opportunism or for preventing it from necessarily reacting by forming factions. However we have the experience of many decades of proletarian struggle which enables us to establish some necessary, optimum conditions of which the research, the defence and the realisation must be the constant task for our movement. We conclude by laying down the most important of these.

- 1) The party must defend and advocate all the clarity and continuity of the communist doctrine throughout its successive historical applications. It must not tolerate the proclamation of principles which are in even partial conflict with its theoretical cornerstones.

2) In every historical situation the party must openly proclaim the complete content of its economic, social, and political program, above all in regards to the question of power, its conquest by means of armed force, and its exercise through dictatorship. Those dictatorships which degenerate into regimes of privileges for a small circle of bureaucrats have always been accompanied by hypocritical ideological proclamations that are masked behind basically populist slogans, sometimes democratic, sometimes nationalist in nature, and by the pretension of having the support of the popular masses. The revolutionary communist party on the other hand does not hesitate to declare its intention of attacking the state and its institutions and of holding the defeated class under the despotic weight of the dictatorship, even when it admits that only an advanced minority of the oppressed class has reached the point of understanding these necessities of the struggle. "Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims" (the Manifesto). Only renegades pride themselves on a supposed ability to attain these aims while cleverly hiding them.

3) The party must observe a strict organisational rigor: it does not accept the idea of increasing its ranks by making compromises with groups or grouplets, or worse still of bargaining to win over the membership of the rank and file by making concessions to alleged leaders.

4) The party must work to instil clear historical understanding of the antagonistic nature of the struggle. Communists demand the initiative of attack against a whole world of rules and regulations, and traditions. They know that they constitute a danger for the privileged classes. They call the masses to the offensive and not to the defensive against the pretended danger of losing supposed gains and improvements won under capitalism. Communists do not lend and lease their party for causes not their own and for non-proletarian objectives such as liberty, country, democracy and other such lies. "Proletarians have nothing to loose but their chains".

5) Communists renounce the whole gamut of tactical expedients which were advocated under the pretext of hastening the process of winning over large strata of the masses to the revolutionary program. Such expedients are the political compromise, the alliance and united front with other parties, and the various slogans concerning the state which were used as substitutes for the dictatorship of the proletariat (such as workers' and peasants' government, progressive democracy).

Communists recognise, historically, that the use of these tactical means is one of the main factors which hastened the decomposition of the proletarian movement and communist soviet

rule. They maintain that those who deplore the opportunist syphilis of the Stalinist movement but who at the same time champion the tactical weapons of the opportunist enemy are more dangerous than the Stalinists themselves.

## Postscript

The work *Force, Violence, and Dictatorship in the Class Struggle*, which we have published in five parts, deals with the questions of the use of force in social relationships and the characteristics of the revolutionary dictatorship according to the correct Marxist interpretation. We did not intentionally go into the question of the organisation of the class and the party, however in the final part of the discussion on the causes of the degeneration of the dictatorship, we were led straight to this point since many people have attributed the degeneration to errors in internal organisation and to the violation of a democratic and elective process within both the party and the other class organisations.

In refuting this thesis, however, we have neglected to mention an important polemic which took place in the Communist International in 1925-26 on the subject of changing the organisational base of the Communist Party to factory cells or factory nuclei. The Italian Left was practically alone in resolutely opposing this change and in insisting that the organisational base must remain territorial.

This position was exhaustively expounded at the time, however the central point was this: the organic function of the party, a function which no other organisation can fulfil, is to lead the struggle from the level of the individual economic struggle on the local and trade basis to the united, general proletarian class struggle which is social and political. Such a task, consequently, cannot be seriously undertaken by an organisational unit which includes only workers of the same trade or concern. This milieu will only be receptive to narrow trade interests, the central directives of the party will seem as something coming from above, something foreign, and the party officials will never meet with the rank and file on an equal footing and in a certain sense they will no longer belong to the party since they are not employed by a concern.

Territorial groups by nature, however, place workers of every trade and workers employed by different employers on the same level as the other militants from social strata which are not strictly proletarian – and the party openly accepts the latter as rank and file members, and initially only as rank and file members, if necessary keeping them in quarantine for some time before calling them, if such a thing is warranted, to organisational positions.

It had been claimed that the factory cell would provide a closer link between the party organisation and the great masses. However we demonstrated at the time that the concept of factory cells contained the same opportunist and demagogic defects as right-wing workerism

and Labourism and counterposed the party officials to the rank and file in a true caricature of Lenin's conception of professional revolutionaries.

The Left replaced the idiotic majoritary criterion, which is copied after bourgeois democracy, with a higher, dialectical criterion which hinges everything on the solid link of both the rank and file militants and the leadership to the strict and obligatory continuity of theory, program and tactics. It rejected any idea of demagogically wooing those wide layers of the masses which are so easily manoeuvrable. The Left's conception of the organisation of the party is, in reality, the only one which can provide protection against the bureaucratic degeneration of the leading strata of the party and against the suffocation of the party's rank and file by the leadership, both of which lead to a situation where the enemy class gains a devastating influence.

## Notes:

1. The Christian-Democratic Prime Minister in 1947 – Ed
2. This expression refers to the left currents headed by Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg who struggled inside the Second International against revisionism and social- pacifism. During World War I and after the October revolution they were violently attacked by the social democrats and the centrists, notably Kautsky – Ed.
3. This refers to Engels' introduction to a reedition of Marx's "Class Struggles in France" in 1895. The leadership of the German Social Democratic Party censored Engels' introduction so that it appeared as an apology of legality at all costs and a demonstration that insurrection was impossible. In spite of the fact that Engels protested this in a letter to Kautsky, the latter did not publish the original introduction. Engels was to die some months later. The original text was discovered only in 1925 – Ed.

Amadeo Bordiga 1949

# Class Struggle and “Bosses’ Offensives”

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## Yesterday

Mistakes in the practice of the proletarian struggle and the ruinous deviations from it, a feature of the First World War period as well as the Second and this postwar period, are closely tied to the muddling up of the cardinal points of the Marxist method.

Marx coordinated the forecast of the revolutionary workers' assault with the economic laws of capitalist development.

Those that revised marxism wanted to find in the defects of the system, strengths that have delayed our revolution for a century. On the basis of the new conditions of transport and world communication, Marx had expected a faster development of it than that of the bourgeois revolution. They pretend therefore that the economic laws are false and that the most recent developments in the bourgeois regime have denied the following central thesis: there is always more wealth which accumulates at one pole, and more poverty at the other.

They've cited, for fifty years, figures for the increase of wage rates, for the increase in the level of variety of products consumed by industrial workers, the results of the enormous machinery of welfare reforms that have the tendency to act against the fall into absolute hunger of the labourers thrown out of the cycle of the waged activity, by misfortune, illness, old age or unemployment. On the other side, they pretend that the extension of the functions of the central machine of the state, its pretension to control abuses and excesses of capitalist speculation, the distribution to all of benefits and of social and collective services is equivalent to replacing socialist demands.

In the revisionist vision, everything tends to show the progressive "possibility" of an always better distribution of the fruits of production amongst those that participate in it, bogging down

powerful socialist longings in the quagmire of a campaign of slimy philanthropy for the stupid expression of a "social justice" proper to a theoretical and literary baggage existing before Marx broke it into pieces.

From its Arcadian idyll, capitalism was transported into the horrors of the tragedy of the mad race of monopolies and imperialism, that ended, in the first place, in the war of 1914. And it is obvious that as long as it persists, lives and grows, there grows and spreads to the same extent suffering and massacres, which is reflected in a vigorous return of the workers' parties to radical positions and to the battle that aims for the destruction and not the reform of the bourgeois social system.

After the new test, theoretically even more decisive, of World War II, the years that lie ahead pose the serious problem of a lack of revolutionary reaction from the methods of proletarian action in the world.

The general law of capitalist accumulation is exposed by Marx in Volume 1 of *Capital*, Chapter 25. The first paragraph explains that the progress of accumulation tends to increase the level of wages. The spread of capitalist production on a large scale, as it took place in the English example between the 15th and the first half of the 18th Century, and all over the world during the second half of the 18th Century, made "a rise of wages take place" with a demand for a greater number of wage workers. It's a waste of time trying to refute Marx with the fact that the wages of the slaves of capital didn't fall! Indeed, immediately after these words, Marx writes: "The more or less favourable circumstances in which the wage-working class supports and multiplies itself, in no way alter the fundamental character of capitalist production.". (Volume 1, Chapter 25, Section 1).

And this fundamental character, which the general law is about, is not determined according to Marx only through the worker-boss relation, but through the relation between the two classes. The composition varies continually. In the bourgeois class, the accumulated wealth concentrates while dividing itself between an always smaller number of hands and especially in an ever smaller number of big enterprises. The final point of this perspective is clearly expressed: "In a given society the limit would be reached only when the entire social capital was united in the hands of either a single capitalist or a single capitalist company" (ibid.) Engels adds in a note that in 1890 this prediction for 1974 was verified by "the most recent American and English trusts". Kautsky, the key Marxist from then on, repeats twenty years after that the phenomenon had spread throughout the capitalist world. Lenin develops in this way in 1915 the complete theory of imperialism. The Marxist school has materials to complete the classic text with these words "... or also from the capitalist nationaliser state, that has at its head Hitlers, Attlees or Stalins".

On the other side of the social trench Marx follows, in this central analysis, as in all his work,



not the oscillation of commodities, but the composition of the non-propertyed population and its variable distribution in the industrial reserve army. And he constructs his general law in the sense that, with the diffusion and the accumulation of capitalism, whatever becomes of the level of pay of the wage workers temporarily employed in the enterprises, the absolute and relative number of all those that remain in reserve increases and these don't even have the products of their own work.

In the fourth part of the same chapter, he manages to enunciate the law, known as the law of increasing misery: "But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus-population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to its torment of labour. The more extensive, finally, the lazarus-layers of the working-class, and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism". (ibid.). Misery and pauperism are, for the Philistine economist, the fact of not having to eat. According to the Catholic monk mentioned by Marx (ibid.), charity sorts it out, according to the modern conquistadors of America, it is the UNRRA. Misery for Marx is what makes, by the incessant "expansion and contraction" of the bourgeois enterprise, the Lazarus proletarian enter and rise from the tomb of everyday lack of means, and this misery grows because the number of those who find themselves trapped within the alternative: die in labour for capital or die from hunger, increases tremendously.

The essential argument of Marx's revisionists was that he had begun in this matter, to revise the Marx of 1848 while writing "Capital". The proof that they have never understood anything, is that in "Capital", Marx cites in this passage his previous work to the "Manifesto" itself, "The Misery of Philosophy" written against the "The Philosophy of Misery" of Proudhon of 1847. He notes just before the phrase "This antagonistic character of capitalistic accumulation", "These relations only produce bourgeois wealth, that is to say the wealth of the bourgeois class, while continually annihilating the wealth of the members making up this class and while constantly producing a ceaselessly growing proletariat". (ibid., Footnote 25 - in French).

It is a central point of marxism, and even the most central, and it is more that ever up and running in the historic course of 1847-1874-1949.

The proletarian is the destitute, that is to say the propertyless, the without-reserves and not the badly paid. The sentence is formulated in a text of Marx's in 1854 which says that the more a country has proletarians the more it is rich. Marx defines the proletarian as follows: the waged employee who produces the capital and valorises it, and that capital throws on to the pavement as soon as he becomes superfluous to the requirements of "Mr. Capital". With his sharp wit, Marx laughs at an author who speaks of the "proletarian of the primitive forest". In fact, the inhabitant of this place is not a landlord, nor a proletarian, "because if he was, it would mean that the forest exploits him instead of him exploiting it".

The place of the worst barbarism is that modern forest that makes use of us, this forest of chimneys and bayonets, machines and weapons, of strange inanimate beasts that feed on human flesh.

## Today

The situation of all the without-reserves, reduced to such a state because, dialectically, they are themselves a reserve, has been aggravated terribly by the experience of the war. The hereditary character of membership of economic classes implies that to be without-reserves is even more serious than to be without life. After the passage of flames of the war, after carpet bombing, members of the working class, no less than at the time of all other disasters, lose not only, most likely, their present job, but see even that minimum reserve of mobile property that constitutes the parts of a rudimentary household destroyed. Titles of possession partly survive all material destruction, because they are the social rights sanctioned by the exploitation of other people. And to write again in letters of fire the Marxist law of antagonism, there is the other observation accessible to all, that the industry of the war and destruction is the one that brings the biggest profits and the biggest concentrations of wealth in the least numerous hands. For the others who lose nothing, there is the industry of reconstruction and the forest of business and the Marshall plan and ERP whose big Jackals are the worthy supreme Administrators.

The wars have therefore thrown, unambiguously, millions and millions of men into the ranks of those who no longer have anything to lose. They have given revisionism the knock-out blow. The word of radical marxism must resound in a terrifying manner: proletarians, in the communist revolution, have nothing to lose but their chains.

The revolutionary class is the one that has nothing to defend and that cannot believe anymore in victories with which it is deceived in the inter-war periods.

The war should have given a place to the initiative and to the offensive of those that have nothing, against the class that has and that dominates everything. On the contrary, it was fraudulently presented as a springboard for actions of the dominant class aiming to take from the proletariat non-existent benefits and out of date gains.

The praxis of the revolutionary party was exchanged for a praxis of defense, of protection and of demands for economic and political "guarantees" that supposedly have been gained for the proletarian class which were in fact precisely guarantees and gains of the bourgeoisie.

The *Manifesto* had engraved this central point, not only in its final sentence, the result of an analysis of the whole social complex that years of struggles and experiences had developed, but also in another of those that Lenin defined as forgotten passages of marxism.

"The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property." (*Communist Manifesto*, Part I).

For Italy, it was the end for the revolutionary movement when - on the order of still-living Zinoviev, who paid very dearly for this irremediable blunder - they threw all their forces into the defense of "guarantees" such as parliamentary freedom and respect for the Constitution.

The character of the action of communists is initiative, and not the reply to so-called provocations. The class offensive, not the defensive. The destruction of guarantees, not their preservation. In the great historic sense, it is the revolutionary class that threatens, it is it that provokes: and it is it that must prepare the Communist Party, and not the plugging, here and there, of supposed leaks in the old tub of bourgeois order, that should, on the contrary, go straight to the bottom.

The problem of the return of the workers of all countries to the line of class struggle depends on recovering the link between the critique of the capitalism and the methods of revolutionary struggle.

As long as the experience of the disastrous mistakes of the past has not been applied, the working class won't escape the hateful protection of those that claim to save it from the supposed threats and provocations that could emerge tomorrow and that they present as intolerable. For at least a century the proletariat has had in front of it and above it that which it cannot tolerate and which, as time passes, will become, according to Marx's law, more and more intolerable.

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[Bordiga Archive](#)

Amadeo Bordiga 1951

# The Filling and Bursting of Bourgeois Civilisation

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The floods in the Po valley and the confused debate over their causes and over the responsibility of organisations and public bodies that did not know how to carry out protection work, with all the disgusting mutual accusations of “speculating” on misfortune, puts into question one of the most widespread false opinions shared by all the contenders. This is that contemporary capitalist society, with the corresponding development of science, technology and production, places the human species in the best possible position to struggle against the difficulties of the natural environment. Hence the contingent fault of the government or of Party A and B, which lies in not knowing how to exploit this magnificent potential at hand, and in the erroneous and culpable administrative and political measures. Hence the no less classic: “Move over, I want to take over now!”

If it is true that the industrial and economic potential of the capitalist world is increasing and not diminishing, it is equally true that the more virulent it is, the worse the living conditions of the human mass are in regards to natural and historical cataclysms. Unlike the periodic spates of rivers, the spate of frenetic capital accumulation knows no perspective of a “decrease”, of a falling curve from the hydrometer readings, but only the catastrophe of the river banks bursting.

## Yesterday

The relationship between the thousands of years long development of man’s production technique and relations with the natural environment is very close. Primitive man, like an animal, gathered and ate wild fruit using a simple grasping action and, like an animal, fled headlong from the disruption of natural phenomena that threatened his life. As the artificial production of products for consumption and the accumulation of reserves of these products and of tools forced him to settle, so too they forced him to defend himself from such threats as the weather<sup>[1]</sup> and natural devastation. Such a defence, not unlike that against other groups

competing for the best site, or predators on the accumulated reserve, could only be collective. From these collective needs arose, as we have seen many times, class division and exploitation by rulers.

In Marx “the capitalist mode of production ... is based on the dominion of man over nature.”<sup>[2]</sup> It also presupposes the war of nature on man. A too generous and lavish nature would not be the favourable environment which capitalism could spring from.

“It is not the mere fertility of the soil, but the differentiation of the soil, the variety of its natural products, the changes of the seasons, which form the physical basis for the social division of labour... It is the necessity of bringing a natural force under the control of society, of economising, of appropriating or subduing it on a large scale by the work of man’s hand, that first plays the decisive part in the history of industry. Examples are, the irrigation works in Egypt, Lombardy, Holland, or in India and Persia where irrigation by means of artificial canals, not only supplies the soil with the water indispensable to it, but also carries down to it, in the shape of sediment from the hills, mineral fertilisers. The secret of the flourishing state of industry in Spain and Sicily under the dominion of the Arabs lay in their irrigation works... One of the material bases of the power of the state over the small disconnected producing organisms in India, was the regulation of the water supply. The Mahometan rulers of India understood this better than their English successors. It is enough to recall to mind the famine of 1866, which cost the lives of more than a million Hindus in the district of Orissa, in the Bengal presidency.”

It is well known that similar famines have raged recently, despite the tremendous potential of world capitalism... The struggle against nature generates industry; man lives on two sacred Dantesque elements, nature and art (the third is God). Capitalism generates the exploitation of man from industry. The bourgeoisie will not be revolted by violence against God, nature and art.

Very modern high capitalism shows serious cases of retreat in the struggle to defend against attacks by the forces of nature on the human species, and the reasons are strictly social and class ones, so much so as to invert the advantage derived from the progress of theoretical and applied science. Let us wait then to blame it for having increased the rainfall intensity with atomic explosions or, tomorrow, with having “messed about” with nature so much as to risk making the earth and its atmosphere uninhabitable and even to make the skeleton explode by priming “chain reactions” of all the elements in nuclear complexes. For now let us establish a social and economic law for the parallel between its greater efficiency in exploiting labour and the life of men and the ever decreasing efficiency in the rational defence against the natural environment, in the widest sense.

The earth’s crust is modified by geological processes which man increasingly learns to distinguish and decreasingly attributes to mysterious wishes of angry forces and which, within certain limits, he learns to correct and control. When, in pre-history, the Po valley was a huge

lagoon through which the Adriatic Sea lapped the foothills of the Alps, the first inhabitants, who evidently were not lucky enough to beg “amphibious craft” from self-interested American charity, occupied pile-dwellings rising above the water. It was a “*terramara*” civilisation of which Venice is a distant development; it was too simple for a “reconstruction business” to be based on it with contracts to supply timber! The pile-dwellings did not collapse during floods: modern brick houses do. However, what means exist today to build raised houses, roads and railways! They would suffice to protect the population. Utopia! The sums do not tally, while the account of 200 billion lire for repair works and reconstruction is quite in order.

In the past, the building of the first embankments dates back to the Etruscans. The natural process of mountainside degradation and the transport of material suspended in river waters from the mountains at flood time has formed a huge, fertile lowland region over the centuries. This convenience assured the settlement of agricultural peoples. The subsequent populations and regimes continued to raise high embankments along the banks of the large rivers, which were insufficient to stop huge cataclysms when the river shifted its course. The shift of the Po near Guastalla onto a new course, which was until then the lowest reach of the Oglio, dates from the fifth century.

In the thirteenth century, the great river abandoned the southern distributory of the huge delta, the present-day secondary “Po di Volano”, in the reach near its mouth and adopted the present course from Pontelagoscuro to the sea. The frightening “shifts” have always been from south to north. A general law assumes a tendency for all the world’s rivers to migrate northwards for geophysical reasons. However, in the case of the Po, this law is evident due to the great difference between its north and south bank tributaries. The former rise in the Alps and have clear water either because they pass through large lakes, or because they do not have a maximum regime during periods of heavy rainfall, but instead during the springtime melting of glaciers. Therefore these rivers do not carry mud and sand deposits into the course of the main river when in flood. However, from the south, from the Apennines, the short and torrential right bank tributaries with their huge variations between maximum and minimum flow pour down the debris of mountain erosion, filling in the right bank section of the Po’s channel, which every so often escapes this damming by turning North.

Chauvinism is not required to know that the science of river hydraulics arose from this problem: for centuries the problem has been posed of the utility and functioning of embankments, or the connection with the problem of the distribution of irrigation water via canals, and finally of river navigation. After the Roman works, information is available about the first canals in the Po valley in 1037. After the victory of Legnano,<sup>[3]</sup> the Milanese built the Naviglio Grande to Abbiategrasso, which was made navigable in 1271. With this arose capitalist agriculture, the first in Europe, and the great hydraulic works were undertaken by state bodies: from the canals and basins of Leonardo, who also provided norms for the river regimes, to the Cavour Canal, begun in 1860.

The construction of embankments to contain rivers raised a major problem: that of raised rivers. While the Alpine rivers, such as the Ticino and Adda, run largely between natural banks, the right bank tributaries and the Po below Cremona are raised: this means that not only the water level, but also the bed of the water course is higher than the surrounding countryside. The embankments save it from being flooded and a collector canal runs parallel to the river to collect local water which it carries to the river downstream: these are the great reclamation works, and as they approach the sea, the transfer of water to the river is performed mechanically so that the districts which are below not only the river, but also the sea, are kept dry. The entire Polesine is a huge low-lying area. Adria is 4 meters above sea level. Rovigo is 5 meters: there the Po's bed is higher and the Adige's even more so. Clearly a breach in the embankments would turn the whole of Rovigo province into a huge lake.

There is a major debate among hydrologists as to whether the rise in the beds of such rivers is progressive. French hydrologists said yes a century ago while the leaders of Italian hydrology opposed them, and the matter is still discussed in congresses today. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that the river load and its deposition extends the mouth out to sea, even if this does not collect in the final reaches of the river's bed. Because of this incessant process, the gradient of the bed and the water surface can only decrease and, according to hydrological law, the speed of the current equally falls: hence the need to raise embankments seemed historically endless and unavoidable. The disastrous nature of the breaches occurring is also progressive.

The availability of modern mechanical means has contributed in this field to extending the method of exploiting large areas of the most fertile land, keeping them dry by continuous pumping. The risk to the tenants and workers worries a profit economy, but the damage caused when the works fall can be balanced against the fertilisation by the invading mud on the one hand and the economic factor on the other: carrying out works is always good capitalist business.

The classic reclamations by alluviation were widespread in the modern period along the entire Italian lowland coast: river water was alternately allowed to flood into and deposit in the great basins, the level of which rose slowly with the double advantage of not letting useful and fertile soil wash out to sea and of providing ever greater security from flooding and future danger. This rational system was found to be too slow for the requirements of capital investment. Another tendentious argument was and is drawn from the continuously rising population density which cannot permit a loss of fertile land. So almost all the old polders, carefully surveyed with precision by the hydrologists of the Austrian, Tuscan and Bourbon regimes, have been destroyed.

Clearly, if today one had to choose from the various radical solutions to these problems, not only would one clash with the incapacity of capitalism to look to the distant future as regards the handing down of installations from generation to generation, but one would also clash with the

strong local interests of farmers and industrialists who have an interest in not having various zones eroded and who play on the attachment of poor people to their inhospitable homes. Since a while back, new solutions have been proposed to create “lateral channels” for the Po.

This type of study is always unpopular because the results forecast are uncertain, something which creates great annoyance in business circles. One solution, on the right, consists in a cut from Pontelagoscuro to the valleys or lagoons of Comacchio: the artificial canal would cut about one third off the length of the present river course to the sea. Such a solution clashes with the big investments in Ferrarese reclamation works and with fish farming, so it would be resisted. But the solutions with more foresight and which perhaps are more in conformity with natural processes call for the reuniting of the Po and Adige courses between which lies the lower Polesana, creating in its Thalweg,<sup>[4]</sup> presently criss-crossed by small water courses, a huge collector and, perhaps, in the final count, a side canal for one if not both rivers would encounter no less resistance.

In the bourgeois period, such a study does not lead to positive research, but to two “policies”, right and left, as regards the Po, with the related conflict between speculating groups.

## Today

There is discussion as to whether the present catastrophe, in which some have already seen the natural formation of a large stable swamp and a shifting of the Po’s course with the total destruction of the north bank, is due to exceptional rainfall and the complicity of natural causes, or to the inexperience and the error of men and directors. Indisputably the succession of wars and crises have caused decades of neglect in the difficult service of technical inspection and embankment maintenance, dredging of river beds where necessary and the systematisation of high mountain basins, the deforestation of which caused greater and more rapid rain water run-off during high water and greater flows of suspended material to the river courses on the plain.

With the bad trend that now prevails in science and official technical organisation, it is even difficult to collect and to compare udometric data (amount of rainfall on various dates in the basin which feeds the river) and hydrometric data (water levels at the hydrometers, maximum flow) with those of the past. Offices and scientists with self-respect now offer replies in line with political requirements and reasons of state, that is, according to the effect that they will have, the figures having been massaged in every possible way. One can also well believe the current of criticism which states that not even the observation stations destroyed during the war have been replaced, and it is also credible that our present technical bureaucracy works with old maps, passed along copy by copy, dragging along slowly over the drawing tables of the lazy



technical personnel, and that it does not update the surveys with new altitude surveys, which are difficult, and with operations of geodetic precision, which allow one to collate the various data of the phenomenon. It lives in masses of maps which are in line with approvals given in circulars in terms of format and colour, but do not give a tinker's cuss for physical reality. The figures handed out here and there for the popular press don't add up, but it is too easy to blame the journalists who know all about nothing.

It therefore remains to be seen — and those movements with wide support and plentiful means could well try to do this — if the intensity of rainfall really was the highest in a century of observation: it is correct to doubt it. The same goes for the hydrometer readings for the maximum levels and flows: it is easy to say that the historical maximum was recorded at Pontelagoscuro at 11,000 cubic meters per second but now has presently risen to 13,000. In 1917 and 1926 there were very large maxima of much lesser consequence, always in spring, up to 13,800 cubic meters per second passing through Piacenza.

Let us say without dwelling further on the matter that the rainfall was certainly not of unheard of proportions and the chief responsibility for the disaster lies in the long lack of necessary services and in the omission of maintenance and improvement works, which is related to the smaller public budget for such works and the way money was spent compared to the past.

It is a matter of providing a cause for these facts, which must be a social and historical cause, and it is puerile to bring up again the “bad management” of those who were or are at the helm of the Italian ship of state. Besides, this is not a uniquely Italian phenomenon, but occurs in all countries. Administrative chaos, thieving, the penetration of speculation into public decision making are now denounced by the conservatives themselves, and in America they have been related to public disasters: even there ultra-modern cities in Kansas and Missouri have fallen victim to badly regulated rivers.[\[5\]](#)

Two mistaken ideas underlie a critique like the one we have just mentioned. One is that the struggle to return from the fascist dictatorship within the bourgeoisie (the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie has existed since it won freedom) to the external multiparty democracy had as its aim a better administration, whereas it is clear that it had to lead, and has led, to a worse administration. This is the fault common to ALL shades in the great block of the CLN.[\[6\]](#)

The other incorrect idea is the belief that the totalitarian form of the capitalist regime (of which Italian fascism was the first great example) gave overwhelming power to the state bureaucracy against the autonomous initiatives of enterprises and private speculation. On the contrary, this form is vital for capitalism's survival and that of the bourgeois class at a certain stage. It concentrates counter-revolutionary powers in the state machine, but renders the administrative machine weaker and more open to manipulation by speculative interests.

Here we need a historical sketch of the Italian administrative machine from the epoch of the

achievement of national unity. Initially it worked well and had strong powers. All the favourable conditions contributed to this. The young bourgeoisie had to pass through the heroic phase and to make sacrifices in order to seize power and to affirm its interests. Therefore the individual elements were still prepared to offer their all and were less attracted by immediate hidden gain. Further resolute enthusiasm was needed to liquidate the resistance of the old powers and of the rusted state machines of the various parts into which the country was originally divided politically.

There was no notable division into parties as the sole party of the liberal revolution governed (virgin in 1860, old slag in 1943) with the clear acquiescence of the few republicans and with the workers' movement yet to appear. The swindles began with the bi-party transformismo of 1876.<sup>[7]</sup> The skeleton of the bureaucracy coming from Piedmont following close on the heels of the military forces of occupation enjoyed a real dictatorship over the local elements and the aristocratic, and clerical, opponents were repressed by emergency powers... as they were guilty of anti-liberalism. Under such conditions, a young, conscientious and honest administrative machine was constructed.

The bureaucracy suffered a twin attack on its uncorrupt dominance with the capitalist system's development in depth and extension. The great entrepreneurs of public works and of productive sectors aided by the state emerged in the economic field, while in the political field, the spread of corruption to parliamentary business became such that every day "the people's representatives" intervened to impinge on the decisions of the executive system and general administration, which previously had functioned with scrupulous impersonality and impartiality.

Public works, which previously had been put in place by the most competent, who were naively pleased to have a regular salary as government functionaries, and who were wholly independent in their judgements and advice, began to be imposed by the executioners: we mean the classical Carrozoni<sup>[8]</sup> began to do the rounds. The machine of state expenditure became decreasingly useful for the community, but all the more financially burdensome.

This process accelerated during the Giolittian period<sup>[9]</sup>, but nevertheless increasing economic prosperity made the damage less obvious. This system, as its political masterpiece, slowly entangled the emerging workers' party. Precisely because Italy has an abundance of labour power and a lack of capital, all sides call on the state to provide work, and the MP who seeks votes in an industrial or agricultural constituency does the rounds of the ministries hunting for the panacea: public works.

After the First World War, the Italian bourgeoisie, even though they came out "winners", saw the favourable wind of the heroic period change too drastically and so there was fascism. The concentration of the policing strength of the state along with the concentration of the control of almost all the economic sectors simultaneously allowed it to avoid the explosion of radical

revolts among the masses and to assure free speculative manoeuvring for the well-off class, on condition that the latter formed itself into a single class centre within the framework of government policy. Every medium or small employer was compelled to make reformist concessions, called for during the long struggle of the workers' organisations which (as usual) they destroyed, stealing their programme, so that while a high degree of capitalist concentration was favoured, the internal situation was pacified. The totalitarian form allows capital to set in motion the reformist trick of the previous decades, latching on to the class collaboration proposed by the traitors of the revolutionary party.

The leadership of the state machine and abundant special laws were clearly placed in the service of business initiatives. The technical legislation — to return to our starting point, dealing with rivers — which around 1865 had produced several masterpieces, was now reduced to a total hotchpotch open to all possible manoeuvres, the functionary being reduced to a puppet of the large firms. The hydrological services were precisely those clashing with the famous idea of private initiative. They require a single institution and full powers — they had a very long tradition. Jacini wrote in 1854. The civil problem of the waters found in Giandomenico Romagnosi an immortal writer of treatises.<sup>[10]</sup> All in all, bourgeois administration and technology had even then class goals, but they were serious, while today they are mere bagatelle.

This led to the bad trend which has caused the degradation and not the improvement of the hydraulic defences in the Paduan plain, starting from a process not concerning just one party or nation, but the centuries long ups and downs of a class regime.

In short, if once the bureaucracy, independent but not omnipotent, laid out its project on the drawing board and then called in bids from public works “enterprises”, compelling them, refusing even the offer of a cup of coffee, to complete them rigorously, thus at most the selection of the funded works was made according to general principles, today the relationship is inverted. The weak and servile technical bureaucracy lets the enterprises themselves draw up the plans and approves them almost unseen, and the enterprises obviously select the profitable works and drop the delicate operations which require more diligence and offer less chance of repetition in the future.

This does not happen because of morality, nor even because in general the functionary gives way to competition and large bribes. It is that if a functionary resists, not only does his workload increase ten-fold, but also the interests against whom he clashes mobilise against him with decisive party influence in the higher echelons of the ministry that employs him. Once the most capable technician gained promotion, now it is the one most able to move in such a system.

When single party fascism gave way to the multi-party system unknown even in Giolittian Italy, even in the constitutional model of perfect England, and so on (where we have never had

ten parties declaredly ready to govern according to the constitution, but at most two or three), things went from bad to worse. They were supposed to restore the experts and the honest men with the Allied armies. What a silly hope so many had: the new changing of the guard has produced the worst of all guards, as on the Po embankments.

It is symptomatic enough in diagnosing the present phase of the capitalist regime that a senior official in the Ministry of Works let slip that the flood surveillance services worked well right up to the fatal moment: the only moment for which they are paid a regular salary. This is the style of modern bureaucracy (for some the new ruling class! Ruling classes arrive with gaping mouths, but not with a failing heart).

No less interesting is what Alberto de Stefani wrote, entitled “The Management of the Po”.<sup>[11]</sup> After outlining the history of measures taken, he cited the judgement of authors in technical journals: “One can never insist too much on the need to react against the system of concentrating the activity of the offices exclusively, or nearly so, on the projection and execution of major works.”

De Stefani did not see the radical implication of such a critique. He deplored the neglect of conservation and maintenance of existing works, while new works were being planned. He cited other passages: “One spends tens of billions (and tomorrow hundreds) for extensions after systematically grudging and withholding those small amounts required for maintenance and even to close breaches.”

That seems to have happened on the Reno. An economist of De Stefani’s calibre scrapes by with saying: “We have too little conservative spirit due to too much uncontrolled fantasy.”

Is it thus perhaps a factor of national psychology? Never: of capitalist production. Capital has become incapable of the social function of transmitting the labour of the present generation to the future ones, utilising the labour of past generations in this. It does not want maintenance contracts, but huge building deals. To enable this, huge natural cataclysms are insufficient — capital creates human ones with ineluctable necessity, and makes post-war reconstruction “the business deal of the century”.

These concepts have to be applied to the critique of the base, demagogic position of the Italian so-called workers’ parties. When speculation and capitalist enterprise are given the capital to invest in hydraulic works which is now committed to armaments, capitalist enterprise (except to cause a crisis among the pseudo- reds of the metallurgical centres, if the business were really to be undertaken) will use that capital in the same way: cheating and speculating at one thousand percent, raising their glasses high to the coming if not of the next war, then of the next flood.

The huge river of human history also has its irresistible and threatening swellings. When the

wave rises, it washes against the two retaining embankments: on the right the conformist one, of Conservation of existing and traditional forces; along it priests chant in procession, policemen and gendarmes patrol, the teachers and cantors of official lies and state-schooling prate.

The left bank is that of the reformists, hedged with “people’s” representatives, the dealers in opportunism, the parliamentarians and progressive organisers. Exchanging insults across the stream, both processions claim to have the recipe to maintain the fast-flowing river in its restrained and enforced channel.

But at great turning points, the current breaks free and leaves its course, “shifting” like the Po at Guastalla and Volano onto an unexpected course, sweeping the two sordid bands into the irresistible flood of the revolution which subverts all old forms of restraint, moulding a new face on society like on the land.

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## Footnotes

[1] Publisher’s note — it actually says “meteore” (meteorites) in the original Italian. We cannot believe that Bordiga and his comrades could have been stupid enough to write this — even humans today cannot defend themselves against meteorites, and it is not just because of the irrationalities of the capitalist system! We therefore have assumed that a mistake was made and the original intent was to make some reference to “meteorologico” (meteorological) phenomena.

[2] Capital, Vol I, Chapter 16 (The English edition of 1887). The following quotation is from the same section

[3] In 1176 the Lombard Communes defeated the Emperor Barbarossa at Legnano.

[4] Line where opposite slopes

[5] Floods in June and July in Kansas and Missouri caused dozens of deaths and left many homeless.

[6] Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale the antifascist front towards the end of the second world war, going from the Communist Party to the monarchists.

[7] On 18 March 1876, the last “destra” government fell and the “sinistra”, based on regional interests, took over. There was, however, little political difference as the two parties transformed into two almost identical schools of thought.

[8] Platonic and wasteful body or enterprise, especially public.

[9] Roughly 1901 to 1914.

[10] La proprietà fondaria e la popolazione agricola in Lombardia (Milan, 1854 - not 1857 as

in the original). Stefano Jacini (1872-91) agronomist, head of the Inchiesta Agraria e sulle condizioni della classe agricola (1884). Minister of public works under Cavour (1860) and again in 1864 and 1867. Gian Domenico Rornagnosi (1761-1835) jurist and philosopher. Considered to be the main inspiration behind the juridical and administrative system adopted by the Kingdom of Italy (1861-1946).

[11] Alberto De Stefani was the Minister of Finance and the Treasury from 1922 to 1925 when he was removed after pressure from financial and industrial groups. He remained a fascist and was tried after the war for this, being acquitted. The article quoted was published in *Il Tempo* (Rome) on 21 November 1951. It reiterates what he had previously written when still a minister: "As one reads on, one will see the path taken since the Kingdom's foundation to the present of the various legislative attempts, of citizens' sacrifices and their real value, of the excellence of provision and execution, of the defectiveness and deviations which the interest of the state and nation sometimes had to suffer because of the upper hand gained by political or particular or special interests." (*L'azione dello Stato per le Opere Pubbliche 1862-1924*, Rome 1925 p. vii)

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### **Bordiga Archive**

Amadeo Bordiga 1951

# Proletarian Dictatorship and Class Party

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## I

### **Every class struggle is a political struggle (Marx).**

A struggle which limits itself to obtaining a new distribution of economic gains is not yet a political struggle because it is not directed against the social structure of the production relations.

The disruption of the relations of production peculiar to a particular social epoch and the overthrow of the rule of a certain social class is the result of a long and often fluctuating political struggle. The key to this struggle is the question of the state: the problem of "who has power?" (Lenin).

The struggle of the modern proletariat manifests and extends itself as a political struggle with the formation and the action of the **class party**. The specific features of this party are to be found in the following thesis: the complete development of the industrial capitalist system and of bourgeois power which issued from the liberal and democratic revolutions, not only does not historically exclude but prepares and sharpens more and more the conflict of class interests and its development into civil war, into armed struggle.

## II

The communist party, as defined by this historical foresight and by this program, accomplishes the following tasks as long as the bourgeoisie maintains power:



- a) it elaborates and propagates the theory of social development, of the economic laws which characterise the present social system of production relations, of class conflicts which arise from it, of the state and of the revolution;
- b) it assures the unity and historical persistence of the proletarian organisation. **Unity** does not mean the material grouping of the working class and seeming working class strata which, due to the very fact of the dominance of the exploiting class, are tinder for the influence of discordant political leaderships and methods of action. It means instead the close international linking-up of the vanguard elements who are fully orientated on the integral revolutionary line. **Persistence** means the continuous claim of the unbroken dialectical line which binds together the positions of critique and struggle successively adopted by the movement during the course of changing conditions;
- c) it prepares well in advance for the class mobilisation and offensive by appropriately employing every possible means of propaganda, agitation and action, in all particular struggles triggered off by immediate interests. This action culminates in the organisation of the illegal and insurrectional apparatus for the conquest of power.

When general conditions and the degree of organisational, political and tactical solidity of the class party reach a point where the general struggle for power is unleashed, the party which has led the revolutionary class to victory through the social war, leads it likewise in the fundamental task of breaking and demolishing all the military and administrative organs which compose the capitalist state. This demolition also strikes at the network of organs, whatever they may be, which pretend to represent the various opinions or interests through the intermediary of bodies of delegates. The bourgeois class state must be destroyed whether it presents itself as the mendacious interclassist expression of the majority of citizens or as the more or less open dictatorship wielded by a government apparatus which pretends to fulfil a national, racial or social-popular mission; if this does not take place, the revolution will be crushed.

### III

In the phase which follows the dismantling of the apparatus of capitalist domination, the task of the political party of the working class is as vital as ever because the class struggle - though dialectically inverted - continues.

Communist theory in regard to the state and the revolution is characterised above all by the fact that it excludes all possibility of adapting the legislative and executive mechanism of the bourgeois state to the socialist transformation of the economy (the social-democratic position). But it equally excludes the possibility of achieving by means of a brief violent crisis a destruction of the state and a transformation of the traditional economic relationships which the



state defended up to the last moment (the anarchist position). It also denies that the constitution of a new productive organisation can be left to the spontaneous and scattered activity of groups of producers shop by shop or trade by trade (the syndicalist position).

Any social class whose power has been overthrown, even if it is by means of terror, survives for a long time within the texture of the social organism. Far from abandoning its hopes of revenge, it seeks to politically reorganise itself and to re-establish its domination either in a violent or disguised way. It has turned from a ruling class into a defeated and dominated one, but it has not instantly disappeared.

The proletariat - which in its turn will disappear as a class alongside all other classes with the realisation of communism - **organises itself as a ruling class (the Manifesto)** in the first stage of the post-capitalist epoch. And after the destruction of the old state, the new proletarian state is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The precondition for going beyond the capitalist system is the overthrow of bourgeois power and the destruction of its state. The condition for bringing about the deep and radical social transformation which has to take place is a new proletarian state apparatus, capable of using force and coercion just as all other historical states.

The presence of such an apparatus does not characterise communist society but instead it characterises the stage of its construction. Once this construction is secured, classes and class rule will no longer exist. But the essential organ of class rule is the state - and the state can be nothing else. Therefore communists do not advocate the proletarian state as a mystical creed, an **absolute** or an **ideal** but as a dialectical tool, a class weapon that will slowly wither away (Engels) through the very realisation of its functions; this will take place gradually, through a long process, as the social organisation is transformed from a system of coercion of men (as it has always been since the dawn of history) into a comprehensive, scientifically built network for the management of things and natural forces.

## IV

After the victory of the proletariat, the role of the state in relationship to social classes and collective organisations exhibits many fundamental differences as compared with its role in the history of the regimes that spring from the bourgeois revolution.

**a)** Revolutionary bourgeois ideology, prior to its struggle and final victory, presented its future post-feudal state not as a class state but as a **peoples state** based on the abolition of every inequality before the law, which it presented to be sufficient to assure freedom and equality for all members of society.

Proletarian theory openly asserts that its future state will be a class state, i.e. a tool wielded by **one** class as long as classes exist. The other classes will be excluded from the state and outlawed in fact as well as in principle. The working class having achieved power "will share it with no one" (Lenin).

**b)** After the bourgeois political victory and in keeping with a tenacious ideological campaign, constitutional charters or declarations of principles were solemnly proclaimed in the different countries as a basis and foundation of the state. They were considered as being immutable in time, a definitive expression of the at last discovered immanent rules of social life. From then on, the entire interplay of political forces was supposed to take place within the insuperable framework of these statutes.

During the struggle against the existing regime, the proletarian state is not presented as a stable and fixed realisation of a set of rules governing the social relationships inferred from an idealistic research into the nature of man and society. During its lifetime the working class state will continually evolve up to the point that it finally withers away: the nature of social organisation, of human association, will radically change according to the development of technology and the forces of production, and man's nature will be equally subject to deep alterations always moving away more and more from the beast of burden and slave which he was. Anything such as a codified and permanent constitution to be proclaimed after the workers revolution is nonsense, it has no place in the communist program. Technically, it will be convenient to adopt written rules which however will in no way be intangible and will retain an "instrumental" and temporary character, putting aside the facetiousnesses about social ethics and natural law.

**c)** Having conquered and even crushed the feudal apparatus of power, the victorious capitalist class did not hesitate to use the force of the state to repress the attempts of counterrevolution and restoration. However the most resolute terroristic measures were justified as being directed not against the class enemies of capitalism but against the **betrayers** of the people, of the nation, of the country, and of civil society, all these hollow concepts being identified with the state itself and, as a matter of fact, with the government and the party in power.

The victorious proletariat, by using its state in order to "crush the unavoidable and desperate resistance of the bourgeoisie" (Lenin) will strike at the old rulers and their last supporters every time they oppose, in a logical defence of their class interests, the measures intended to uproot economic privilege. These social elements will keep an estranged and passive position **vis-à-vis** the apparatus of power: whenever they try to free themselves from the passivity imposed upon them, material force will subdue them. They will share no "social contract", they will have no "legal or patriotic duty". As veritable social prisoners of war (as in fact were the former aristocrats and clergymen for the Jacobean bourgeoisie) they will have nothing to **betray** because they will not be requested to take any ridiculous oath of allegiance.

**d)** The historical glitter of the popular assemblies and democratic gatherings hardly disguised the fact that, at its birth, the bourgeois state formed armed bodies and a police force for the internal and external struggle against the old regime and quickly substituted the guillotine for the gallows. This executive apparatus was charged with the task of administering legal force both on the great historical level and against isolated violations of the rules of appropriation and exchange characteristic of the economy founded on private property. It acted in a perfectly natural manner against the first proletarian movements which threatened, even if only instinctively, the bourgeois form of production. The imposing reality of the new social dualism was hidden by the game of the "legislative" apparatus which claimed to be able to bring about the participation of all citizens and all the opinions of the various parties in the state and in the management of the state with a perfect equilibrium and within an atmosphere of social peace.

The proletarian state, as an open class dictatorship, will dispose of all distinctions between the executive and legislative levels of power, both of which will be united in the same organs. The distinction between the legislative and executive is, in effect, characteristic of a regime which conceals and protects the dictatorship of one class under an external cloak which is multi-class and **multi-party**. "The Commune was a working, not a parliamentary body" (Marx).

**e)** The bourgeois state in its classical form - in coherence with an individualist ideology which the theoretical fiction universally extends to all citizens and which is the mental reflection of the reality of an economy founded on the monopoly of private property by one class - refused to allow any intermediate body other than elective constitutional assemblies to exist between the isolated individual subject and the legal state centre. Political clubs and parties that had been necessary during the instructional stage were tolerated by it by virtue of the demagogic assertion of free thought and on the condition that they exist as simple confessional groupings and electoral bureaux. In a later stage the reality of class repression forced the state to tolerate the association of economic interests, the labour unions, which it distrusted as a "state within the state". Finally, unions became a form of class solidarity adopted by the capitalists themselves for their own class interests and aims. Moreover, under the pretext of **legally recognising** the labour unions, the state undertook the task of absorbing and sterilising them, thus depriving them of any autonomy so as to prevent the revolutionary party from taking their leadership.

Labour unions will still be present in the proletarian state in so far as there still remains employers or at least impersonal enterprises where the workers remain wage earners paid in money. Their function will be to protect the standard of living of the working class, their action being parallel on this point to that of the party and the state. Non-working class unions will be forbidden. Actually, on the question of distribution of income between the working class and the non-proletarian or semi-proletarian classes, the worker's situation could be threatened by considerations other than the superior needs of the general revolutionary struggle against international capitalism. But this possibility, which will long subsist, justifies the unions' secondary role in relation to the political communist party, the international revolutionary

vanguard, which forms a unitary whole with the parties struggling in the still capitalist countries and as such leads the proletarian state.

The proletarian state can only be "animated" by a single party and it would be senseless to require that this party organise in its ranks a statistical majority and be supported by such a majority in "popular elections" - that old bourgeois trap. One of the historical possibilities is the existence of political parties composed in appearance by proletarians, but in reality influenced by counterrevolutionary traditions or by foreign capitalism's. This contradiction, the most dangerous of all, cannot be resolved through the recognition of formal rights nor through the process of voting within the framework of an abstract "class democracy". This too will be a crisis to be liquidated in terms of relationships of force. There is no statistical contrivance which can ensure a satisfactory revolutionary solution; this will depend solely upon the degree of solidity and clarity reached by the revolutionary communist movement throughout the world. A century ago in the West, and fifty years ago in the Czarist Empire, Marxists rightly argued against the simple-minded democrats that the capitalists and proprietors are a minority, and therefore the only true government of the majority is the government of the working class. If the word democracy means power of the majority, the democrats should stand on our class side. But this word both in its literal sense ("power of the people") as well as in the dirty use that is more and more being made of it, means "power belonging not to one but to all classes". For this historical reason, just as we reject "bourgeois democracy" and "democracy in general" (as Lenin also did), we must politically and theoretically exclude, as a contradiction in terms, "class democracy" and "workers' democracy".

The dictatorship advocated by marxism is necessary because it cannot be unanimously accepted and furthermore it will not have the naiveté to abdicate for lack of having a majority of votes, if such a thing were ascertainable. Precisely because it declares this it will not run the risk of being confused with a dictatorship of men or groups of men who take control of the government and substitute themselves for the working class. The revolution requires a dictatorship, because it would be ridiculous to subordinate the revolution to a 100 % acceptance or a 51 % majority. Wherever these figures are displayed, it means that the revolution has been betrayed.

In conclusion the communist party will rule alone, and will never give up power without a physical struggle. This bold declaration of not yielding to the deception of figures and of not making use of them will aid the struggle against revolutionary degeneration.

In the higher stage of communism - a stage which does not know commodity production, money nor nations and which will also witness the death of the state - labour unions will be deprived of their "reason to be". The party as an organisation for combat will be necessary as long as the remnants of capitalism survive in the world. Moreover, it may always have the task of being the depository and propagator of social doctrine, which gives a general vision of the

development of relationships between human society and material nature.

## V

The marxist conception, that of substituting parliamentary assemblies with working bodies, does not lead us back into "economic democracy" either, i.e. into a system which would adapt the state organs to the workplaces, to the productive or commercial units, etc., while excluding from any representative function the remaining employers and the individuals still owning property. The elimination of the employer and the proprietor only defines half of socialism; the other half, the most significant one, consists of the elimination of **capitalist economic anarchy** (Marx). As the new socialist organisation emerges and develops with the party and the revolutionary state in the foreground, it will not limit itself to striking only the former employers and their flunkies but above all it will redistribute the social tasks and responsibilities of individuals in quite a new and original way.

Therefore the network of enterprises and services such as they have been inherited from capitalism will not be taken as the basis of an apparatus of so-called "sovereignty", that is of the delegation of powers within the state and up to the level of its central bodies. It is precisely the presence of the single-class state and of the solidly and qualitatively unitary and homogeneous party which offers the maximum of favourable conditions for a reshaping of social machinery that be driven as little as possible by the pressures of the limited interests of small groups and as much as possible by general data and by their scientific study in the interests of the collective welfare. The changes in the productive mechanism will be enormous; let us only think of the program for reversing the relationships between town and country, on which Marx and Engels insisted so much and which is the exact antithesis to present trends in all countries.

Therefore, the network modelled after the work place is an inadequate expression which repeats the old Proudhonist and Lassalian positions that Marxism long ago rejected and surpassed.

## VI

The definition of the type of links between the organs of the class state and its base depends first of all upon the results of historical dialectics and cannot be deduced from "eternal principles", from "natural law", or from a sacred and inviolable constitutional charter. Any further details in this regard would be mere utopia. There is not a grain of utopianism in Marx, Engels stated. The very idea of the famous delegation of power by the isolated individual (elector) thanks to a platonic act emanating from his freedom of opinion must be left to the

foggy realms of metaphysics; opinions in actuality are but a reflection of material conditions and social forms, and power consists of the intervention of physical force.

The negative characterisation of the proletarian dictatorship is clearly defined: the bourgeois and semi-bourgeois will no longer have political rights, they will be prevented by force from gathering in groups of common interests or in associations for political agitation; they will never be allowed to vote, elect, or delegate others to any post or function whatsoever. But even the relationship between the worker - a recognised and active member of the class in power - and the state apparatus will no longer retain that fictitious and deceitful characteristic of a **delegation** of power, of a representation through the intermediary of a **deputy**, an election ticket, or by a party. Delegation means in effect the renunciation to the possibility of direct action. The pretended "sovereignty" of the democratic right is but an abdication, and in most cases it is an abdication in favour of a scoundrel.

The working members of society will be grouped into local territorial organs according to their place of residence, and in certain cases according to the displacements imposed by their participation in a productive mechanism in full transformation. Thanks to their uninterrupted and continuous action, the participation of all active social elements in the mechanism of the state apparatus, and therefore in the management and exercise of class power, will be assured. To sketch these mechanisms is impossible before the class relationships from which they will spring have been concretely realised.

## VII

The Paris Commune established as most important principles (see Marx, Engels, Lenin) that its members and officials would be subject to recall at any time, and that their salary would not exceed the wage of an average worker. Any separation between the producers on the periphery and the bureaucrats at the centre is thus eliminated by means of systematic rotations. Civil service will cease being a **career** and even a **profession**. No doubt, when put into practice, these controls will create tremendous difficulties, but it was long ago that Lenin expressed his contempt for all plans of revolutions to be carried out **without difficulties!** The inevitable conflicts will not be completely resolved by drawing up piles of rules and regulations: they will constitute a historical and political problem and will express a real relationship of forces. The Bolshevik revolution did not stop in front of the Constituent Assembly but dispersed it. The workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils had risen. This new type of state organs which burst forth in the blaze of the social war (and were already present in the revolution of 1905) extended from the village to the entire country through a network of territorial units; their formation did not answer to any of the prejudices about the "rights of man" or the "universal, free, direct and secret" suffrage!

The communist party unleashes and wins the civil war, it occupies the key positions in a military and social sense, it multiplies its means of propaganda and agitation a thousand-fold through seizing buildings and public establishments. And without losing time and without procedural whims, it establishes the "armed bodies of workers" of which Lenin spoke, the red guard, the revolutionary police. At the meetings of the Soviets, it wins over a majority to the slogan: "All power to the Soviets!". Is this majority a merely legal, or a coldly and plainly numerical fact? Not at all! Should anyone - be he a spy or a well-intentioned but misled worker - vote for the Soviet to renounce or compromise the power conquered thanks to the blood of the proletarian fighters, he will be kicked out by his comrades' rifle butts. And no one will waste time with counting him in the "legal minority", that criminal hypocrisy which the revolution can do without and which the counterrevolution can only feed upon.

## VIII

Historical facts different from those of Russia in 1917 (i.e. the recent collapse of feudal despotism, a disastrous war, the role played by opportunist leaders) could create, while remaining on the same fundamental line, different practical forms of the basic network of the state. From the time the proletarian movement left utopianism behind, it has found its way and assured its success thanks not only to the real experience of the present mode of production and the structure of the present state, but also to the experience of the strategic mistakes of the proletarian revolution, both on the battlefield of the "hot" civil war where the Communards of 1871 gloriously fell and on the "cold" one which was lost between 1917 and 1926 - this last was the great battle of Russia between Lenin's International and world capitalism supported in the front lines by the miserable complicity of all the opportunists.

Communists have no codified constitutions to propose. They have a world of lies and constitutions - crystallised in the law and in the force of the dominant class - to crush. They know that only a revolutionary and totalitarian apparatus of force and power, which excludes no means, will be able to prevent the infamous relics of a barbarous epoch from rising again - only it will be able to prevent the monster of social privilege, craving for revenge and servitude, from raising its head again and hurling for the thousandth time its deceitful cry of **Freedom!**



Amadeo Bordiga 1951

# Doctrine of the Body Possessed by the Devil

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It is vital to be quite clear about the question of state capitalism in order to reset the compasses that have lost their bearings.[\[1\]](#)

We have managed to gather many contributions to this question from the range of traditional concepts of the marxist school that show that state capitalism is not only the latest aspect of the bourgeois world, but that its forms, even complete ones, are very old and correspond with the very emergence of the capitalist type of production. They served as the main factors in primitive accumulation and long preceded the fictitious and conventional environment of *private enterprise*, of *free initiative* and other fine things which are found far more in the field of apology than in the real world.

As we have already said, there are many groups in the camp of the left communist anti-stalinists who do not see things in this way. We say to them, on the basis of earlier texts, for example: “Wherever it may be, wherever there is the economic form of the market, capitalism is a *social* force. It is a *class* force. And it has the *political* state at its disposal.”[\[2\]](#)

And let us add the formula which, for us, expresses very well the most recent aspects of the world economy: “State capitalism is not a subjugation of capitalism to the state, but a firmer subjugation of the state to capital.”

These groups, however, find the terms of the first thesis were: “correct until 1900, the epoch of the opening of imperialist expansion and, as such, remain up to date, but are incomplete when the evolution of capitalism gave to the state the function of taking over the final moments of such an evolution from private initiative.”

And they continue by saying that we will be late-comers in the world of economic “culture” if we fail to understand that where this thesis fails to fit in with history, it ceases to be marxist, and if we do not request the addition of the study of the *state economy* to Marx’s analysis, taking this from texts written by the *powerful personality* of the economist Kaiser.[\[3\]](#) A bad habit! A



text which seeks to establish given relations between things and facts is checked against things and facts and not against the signature on the book, which is based on the more or less powerful or powerless personality of the author.

Personalities? Stick them up your Kaiser as far as we are concerned! And if in 1950 the idol of private enterprise is corroded, we well know that Sir Karl reduced this to minute fragments a good century ago: you see we know this because we are stubborn late-comers, lazy in reading the latest books...

In Marxism, the concept of private initiative does not *exist*: look down at the compass dial, not up to heaven like the person who hears paradoxes (paradox — something which common sense says is incorrect when it is very much correct).

We have said in thousands of speeches of propaganda that the socialist programme is for the *abolition of private property* of the means of production, which is borne out by Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and Lenin on Marx. We said property and not private economy. The precapitalist economy was private, or individual. Property is a term which does not indicate a purely economic relationship, but also a legal one and brings into discussion not just the productive forces, but also the relations of production. Private property means private right sanctified by bourgeois legal codes: it brings us to the state and to power, a matter of force and violence in the hands of a class. Our old and valid formula means nothing if it does not already contain the concept that in order to overcome the capitalist economy, the juridical and state structure corresponding to it must also be overcome.

These basic concepts should suffice to reject the insidious content of the following thesis: the social programme is enacted when individual property becomes state property, when the factory is nationalised.

Let us be quite clear, the groups with which we are in dispute do not state that state capitalism is already socialism, but fall into saying that it is a third and new form between *private* capitalism and socialism. They say in fact that there are two distinct periods: that in which “the state has more of the older policing function than that of involvement in the economy”, and that in which “it gives the maximum power to the exercise of force specifically to protect the economy centralised in it”. We say that in these two formulae, which are more or less faithfully reproduced, and even more so the two historical periods, that capitalism is the same, the ruling class is the same, and the historical state is the same. The economy is the entire social field in which production and distribution occur and includes the men participating in this: the state is a specific organisation acting in the social field, and the state in the capitalist period has always had the function of policeman and protector of the interests of a class and a type of production corresponding historically with this class. The state concentrating the economy within itself is an incongruous formula. For marxism, the state is always present in the economy — its power

and legal violence are economic factors from first to last. One can best explain it this way: in certain cases, the state, with its administration, assumes the management of industrial concerns; and if it assumes the management of all of them, then it will have centralised the management of the concerns, but not of the economy. Especially so long as distribution takes place with money prices (that these are fixed officially does not matter) the state is a firm among firms, a contractor among contractors; all the worse in that it considers as *firms* each of its national enterprises, as with the Labourites, Churchillians and Stalinists. Getting away from this situation is not a question of administrative measures, but a problem of revolutionary force, of class war.

The problem is posed better in an interesting bulletin published by the comrades of the “*Groupe français de la gauche communiste internationale*”[\[4\]](#) of which — with great pleasure — we do not know the names and personalities. Sensible questions are asked on the problem which deserve further development, and the problem is posed in contrast to the vision of the noted Chaulieu group, which is influenced by the theory of “decadence” and of the transition from capitalism to *barbarism* which inspires in them, however, the same horror as that of the “bureaucratic” regimes. A theory in which one does not know what on earth the compasses are indicating until they prattle about marxism. There are elements in the internal bulletin of our movement[\[5\]](#) on the *decadence* of capitalism where we deal with the false theory of the descending curve. Without any haughtiness scientifically speaking, it is only foolishness to tell a story which reads: Oh capitalism, grab us, swindle us, reduce us to a worn out old dog not worth a kick in the ribs, we will quickly recover — all this just means that you are decaying. Just imagine that it is decaying...

As for *barbarism*, it is the opposite of civilisation and so of bureaucracy. Our barbarian ancestors, lucky them, did not have organisational apparatuses based (old Engels!) on two elements — a defined ruling class and a defined territory. There was the clan, the tribe, but still not the *civitas*. *Civitas* means city and also state. Civilisation is the opposite of barbarism and means state organisation, therefore necessarily bureaucracy. More state means more civilisation means more bureaucracy, while class civilisations follow one upon the other. This is what marxism says. It is not the return to barbarism, but the start of *supercivilisation*, which is duping us everywhere, that the monsters of contemporary state super-organisations dominate. But let us leave the members of *Socialisme ou barbarie* to their existential crisis. The bulletin we quoted refutes them in an article with the correct title: *Deux ans de bavardage*: Two years of chattering — No chattering here, please note!

Let us come to the balanced formula with which the French comrades formulated the question — *the definition of the ruling class of the state capitalist countries, the exactitude or insufficiency of the definition: capitalism heir to the liberal revolutions*.

The conclusion presented by this group is correct: stop presenting the bureaucracy as an autonomous class, perfidiously warmed-up within the proletariat, and instead consider it as a

huge apparatus linked to a given historical situation in the world-wide evolution of capitalism. Here we are on the right track. The bureaucracy, which all class societies have known, is not a class, it is not a productive force, it is one of the “forms” of production appropriate to a given cycle of class rule. In certain historical phases it appears to be the protagonist on the stage — we too were about to say in the phase of decadence — they are in fact pre-revolutionary phases and those of maximum expansion. Why call the society ready for the *midwife of the revolution*, the obstetrician who will give birth to the new society, decadent? The pregnant woman is not decadent, but the sterile one is. Chaulieu sees the inflated belly of capitalist society and mistakes the inadequate skill of the obstetrician confronted with the swollen uterus with the imaginary infertility of the pregnant woman. They accuse the Kremlin bureaucracy of giving us a still-born socialism due to their abuse of power, while the fault lies in not having taken up the forceps of the revolution to open up the belly of Europe-America, driven by flourishing capital accumulation, and having made a useless effort on an infertile womb. And perhaps only on an infertile womb, inverting the battle for grain with the battle for seed.[\[6\]](#)

Let us go on to the purely marxist-economic point after this brief clarification. The statement “capitalism heir to the liberal revolutions”, which correctly made the central point, contains the precise historical thesis: capitalism has a cycle, a single class course, from the bourgeois to the proletarian revolution, and it cannot be split into several cycles without renouncing revolutionary marxism. But, it must be said, as it is said a little further on, capitalism appeared from the *bourgeois* (not *liberal*) revolutions or, better still, “anti-feudal” revolutions. In fact liberalism became the goal and motive of these revolutions, their general idea, only through bourgeois apologetics. Marx rejected this and for him the historical goal of these revolutions is the destruction of the obstacles to the domination of the capitalist class.

Only in that sense is the abbreviated formulation correct. It is quite clear: capital can easily get rid of liberalism without changing its nature. And this is also clear: the direction of the *degeneration*, the degeneration of the revolution in Russia does not pass from the revolution for communism to the revolution for a *developed kind* of capitalism, but to a *pure* capitalist revolution. It runs in parallel with world-wide capitalist domination which, by successive steps, eliminates old feudal and Asiatic forms in various zones. While the historical situation in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries caused the capitalist revolution to take liberal forms, in the twentieth century it must have totalitarian and bureaucratic ones.

The difference is not due to basic qualitative variations of capitalism, but to the huge diversity in quantitative development, as with the intensity in each metropole, and the diffusion over the planet’s surface.

The fact that capitalism decreasingly adopts for its conservation, just as for its development and enlargement, liberal chit-chat and ever increasingly uses police methods and bureaucratic suffocation, when the historical line is clearly seen, does not cause the slightest hesitation over

the certainty that the same means must serve in the proletarian revolution. It will make use of this violence, power, state and bureaucracy, *despotism* as the Manifesto called it with a yet more dreadful term 103 years ago. Then it will know how to get rid of all of them.

The surgeon does not put down the blood stained lancet before the new life has emerged and has drawn its first breath, the hymn to life.

## Yesterday

Does not the basic form of capitalism disappear with the disappearance of the private individuals who, as owners of factories, organise production? This is the objection in the economic field which attracts many people's attention.

“The capitalist” is named a hundred times by Marx. Besides, the word “capital” comes from the word *caput*, meaning head, and so traditionally capital is any wealth linked, intestate, to any singular titular person. *However*, the thesis to which we have dedicated expositions for a long time doesn't contain anything new, but only explains, remaining true, that the marxist analysis of capitalism does not consider as vital the element of the *person* of the factory owner.

Quotations from Marx would be innumerable: let us then conclude with just one.

Let us take the so called “classic” capitalism of the “free” factory. Marx always put these in quotation marks, they in fact characterise the bourgeois school he fought and destroyed with his economic concepts — this is the point that is always forgotten.

One naturally supposes that Mr. X, the first capitalist to appear, had a sum of money to hand. Good. Entire sections of Marx's work reply with the question: how come? The replies vary: theft, robbery, usury, black marketeering or, as we have seen more than a few times, royal charter or law of the land.

So X, instead of stashing his gold coins in a sack, so as to run his fingers through them every night, acts as a citizen imbued with liberal and humanitarian social ideals. He nobly faces the risks and circulates his capital.

So, first element accumulated money.

Second element, acquisition of raw materials, the classic raw cotton bales, of so many little chapters and paragraphs.

Third element, acquisition of the works where he sets up plant and looms to spin and weave.

Fourth element, technical organisation and management. The classic capitalist looks after this himself. He has studied, gone on trips and journeys and has thought out new systems to work the bales and, by producing thread in quantity, cuts costs. He will dress cheaply yesterday's urchins and even the blacks of Central Africa who were used to going about naked.

Fifth element, the workers at the looms. They do not have to bring an ounce of raw cotton or a single spare spool — that happened in the semi-barbaric times of individual production. But at the same time there will be trouble if they remove a single thread of cotton to patch their trousers. They are rewarded with a just equivalent for their labour time.[\[7\]](#)

Through the combination of these elements, one achieves the one that is the motive and the reason for the whole process: the mass of yarn or textiles. The essential fact is that only the capitalist can take this to market and the financial return is his and his alone.

Always the same old story. Yes, you know the little sum — the cost of the raw cotton, something for the wear and tear on plant and machinery, the workers wages. Receipts: the price of the product sold. This is greater than the sum of the costs and the difference constitutes the profit margin of the factory.

It matters little that the capitalist does what he likes with the money he gets back — he could do that with his original cash already without manufacturing anything. The important fact is that after restocking in everything to the level of his original investment, he still has a mass of money on hand. He could consume it himself, certainly. But *socially* he *cannot*, and something forces him to in large part invest it, to translate it into capital again.

Marx says that the life cycle of capital consists only in its movement as value perpetually set in motion so as to multiply itself. The desire of the person of the capitalist is not required in this, nor would he be able to impede it. Economic determinism not only obliges the worker to sell his labour time, but similarly the capitalist to invest and accumulate. Our criticism of liberalism does not consist in saying there is a free class and a slave class. There is an exploited one and a profiteering one, but they are both tied to the laws of the historical capitalist mode of production.

The process is therefore not within the factory, but is social and can only be understood as such. Already in Marx there is the hypothesis of the separation of the various elements from the person of the capitalist entrepreneur, which is substituted with a share participation in the profit margin of the productive enterprise. Firstly, the money can be got from a lender, a bank, who receives periodic interest. Secondly, in such a case the materials acquired with that money are not really the property of the entrepreneur, but of the financier. Thirdly, in England the owner of a building, house or factory may not be the owner of the land on which it stands: thus houses and factories can be rented. Nothing prohibits the same for looms and other machinery and tools. Fourth element, the entrepreneur may lack technical and administrative managerial

capacities, he hires engineers and accountants. Fifth element, workers' wages — evidently their payment too is made from loans from the financier.

The strict function of the entrepreneur is reduced to that of having seen that there is a market demand for a certain mass of products which have a sale price above the total cost of the preceding elements. Here the capitalist class is restricted to the entrepreneurial class, which is a social and political force, and the principal basis of the bourgeois state. But the strata of entrepreneurs does not coincide with that of money, land, housing and factory owners and commodity suppliers.

There are two basic forms and points required to recognise capitalism. One is that the right of the productive enterprise to dispose of the products and the sales proceeds (controlled prices or requisitions of commodities do not impair the right to such proceeds) is unimpaired and unimpairable. What guards this central right in contemporary society is from the outset a *class monopoly*, it is a structure of power, and the state, the judiciary and police punish whoever breaks this norm. Such is the condition for enterprise production. The other point is that the social classes are not isolated one from another. There are no longer, historically speaking, castes or orders. Belonging to the landed aristocracy was something that lasted more than one lifespan, as the title was handed down through the generations. Ownership of buildings or large finances lasts on average at least a lifespan. The "average period of personal membership of a given individual to the ruling class" tends to become even shorter. For this reason we are concerned about the extremely developed form of *capital*, not the *capitalist*. This director does not need fixed people. It finds and recruits them wherever it wants and changes them in ever more mind bending shifts.

## Today

Here we cannot demonstrate that Lenin's "parasitic capitalism" does not mean that power lies more in the hands of the financial capitalists than in those of the industrial capitalists. Capitalism could not spread and expand without growing more complicated and progressively separating into the various elements which enter into the competition for speculative gain: finance, technology, equipment, administration. The tendency is for the largest margin and social control to slip from the grasp of positive and active elements to become concentrated in the hands of speculators and business banditry.

We shall therefore fly from Marx to... Don Sturzo.

This latter, with his habitual prudence, took in hand the INA scandal<sup>[8]</sup>. What he said is interesting: "I cannot say what happened during fascism because I was in America, but where

these things are the order of the day, many others may come to light!” We can be sure of it. The capitalist parasitism of contemporary Italy beats that of Mussolini, and both remain child’s play in comparison with wheeler-dealer US business.

INA had huge finances because it collected all the workers’ social security contributions, like other similar state institutions with their well known initials. It pays slowly so its safes are stuffed with ready cash. It therefore has the right (since it has no head, no body and no soul — it is for good reason that we are in the civilisation of *habeus corpus*) not to let such wealth lie idle, so it employs and invests it. What good luck for the modern entrepreneur! He is the capitalist without capital, just as dialectically modern capital is capital without the boss, acephalous.

The bad business, the clever Sicilian priest says (those in the gallery yearn soon to make an exaggerated oration at his funeral) was the formation of too many *front companies* under the INA.

What the hell are front companies? Some types, versed in business who have luxurious offices and have crept into the economic and political outer offices, who do not have a penny or registered stock or buildings to their names, (they do not even rent houses, but live in big hotels, they know Vanoni<sup>[9]</sup> backwards, but Vanoni does not know them<sup>[10]</sup>)”plan” a given deal and register a company with the plan as its sole asset. INA, or some similar body, will give it the money and if some “special law” is required, let us say for raising cocks in old army bases, a problem is hastily brought to the attention of national leaders, especially by a forceful speech on government ineptitude by one of the opposition MPs, which solves all.

In fact, once the common impresario went to the bank to borrow money to use in the business planned. The bank replied: good, here it is, where are your securities? Out with your property and other titles... But a state-run organisation does not have these trifling needs: the *national good* is enough for it to pull out the cash. The rest of the tale tells itself. If the old impresario with his plan and production project created not cocks but cock-ups, he was finished — he did not get his money back and he exited from the boss class humiliated.

Our *front company* with its brilliant general staff does not live in this fear: if it produces cocks, they are sold to poultry farmers for a good price, money is earned. If, supposing it does not produce cocks or no one wants cocks, no matter — hand-outs, indemnities and profit shares have all been cashed in and INA pays for the mistaken cock farm plan.

We have explained what state capitalism (or the *economy centralised in the state*) means by this small and banal example. It should be said that INA’s loss is shared by all the poor unfortunates who pay into its coffers another cut of their daily wages.

State capitalism is finance concentrated in the state at the disposal of passing wheeler-dealers



of enterprise initiative. Never has free enterprise been so free as when the profit remained but the loss risk has been removed and transferred to the community.

The state alone can print as much money as it wants and can deal with the forger. The progressive expropriation of small owners and capitalist concentration in successive historical forms is based on this initial principal of force. We have with reason repeatedly stated that no economy in which firms present accounts and exchange is carried out in money, can avoid such laws.

The power of the state is therefore based on the convergent interests of these profiteers benefiting from speculative plans of firms and from their web of deep-seated international relations.

How can these states not lend capital to those gangs which never settle their debts with the state except by forcing the exploited classes to pay up? There is the proof that these “capitalising” states are in chronic debt to the bourgeois class, or if you want fresh proof, it lies in the fact that they are obliged to borrow, taking back their money and paying interest on it.

The socialist administration of a “centralised economy” would not provide outside takings to any “plan” just as it would not pay interest. Besides, it would not deal in money.

Capital is only *concentrated* in the state for the convenience of surplus-value and profit manoeuvring. It remains “available to all” or available to the components of the entrepreneurial class — no longer simply production entrepreneurs, but openly business entrepreneurs — they no longer produce commodities, but, Marx has already said, they produce surplus value.

The capitalist as person no longer serves in this — capital lives without him but with its same function multiplied 100 fold. The human subject has become useless. A class without members to compose it? The state not at the service of a social group, but an impalpable force, the work of the Holy Ghost or of the Devil? Here is Sir Charles’s irony. We offer the promised quotation: “By turning his money into commodities which serve as the building materials for a new product, and as factors in the labour process, by incorporating living labour into their lifeless objectivity, the capitalist simultaneously transforms value, i.e. past labour in its objectified and lifeless form, into capital, value which can perform its own valorisation process, an animated monster which begins to ‘work’, ‘as if possessed by the devil’.”[\[1\]](#)

Capital must be seized by the horns.

## Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) Cf. *Bussola impazzite* (compasses struck with madness).



[2] *Proprieta' e capitale* (Iskra, Milan, 1980) p. 130

[3] Henry Kaiser proposed “social” capitalism with workers sharing the profits.

[4] A bulletin issued in September 1951 by the group that later became the French section of the International Communist Party. Chaulieu = Castoriadis, a founder of the group *Socialisme ou barbarie*.

[5] “Il rovesciamento della prassi” now in *Partito e classe* (Milan, 1972) pp. 120-1, 130. “This theory (of the descending curve) comes from gradualist reformism: there are no drops, shaking or leaps.” (Point 4)

[6] Reference to the Stalin-Khrushchev attempt to increase corn yields.

[7] Publishers Note — Bordiga’s use of the term “labour time” is perhaps a slip of the pen. Basic for Marx is that despite the appearance that workers are paid for their labour or labour time, they actually sell and receive payment for their labour power — their capacity to labour. The value of this labour power is its cost of reproduction: “the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner.” (*Capital* Vol. I, p 274) While the wage form gives the appearance that all a worker’s labour is paid for, for Marx part of workers’ labour time reproduces the value of their labour power and is thus “paid” — and the rest of it is surplus to this and thus is “unpaid”. (See *Capital* Vol. I, chapters 6 & 7)

[8] Don Sturzo: former priest, leader of the catholic right in the Christian Democrats, opposed to corruption in the party and the state. INA (*Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni*) launched in 1912 to become the state monopoly, liberal opposition led to it being made into a state body but maintaining “greater autonomy and a more strikingly private type of internal structure than state bodies” (Candeloro *Storia dell’ Italia moderna*, Milan, 1974, Vol. VII, p. 307). It could therefore operate in the way described in the text.

[9] Publisher’s Note — Vanoni was the Italian Minister of Finance of the day.

[10] Cf. footnote 8 above.

[11] *Capital* Vol. I, p. 302. The final quotation from Goethe’s Faust, is more correctly translated as “as if its body were by love possessed”.

**Amadeo Bordiga. 1951**

# Characteristic Theses of the Party

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## I. Theory

The doctrine of the Party is founded on the principles of the historical materialism of the critical communism set out by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto, in Capital and their other fundamental works and which formed the basis of the Communist International constituted in 1919 and of the Italian Communist Party founded at Leghorn in 1921 (section of the Communist International).

- 1.** In the present capitalist social regime an ever increasing contrast between productive forces and production relations is developing. This contrast reveals itself in the opposing interests and the class struggle between the proletariat and the ruling bourgeoisie.
- 2.** The present production relations are protected by the bourgeois State. Even when democratic elections are used and whatever the form of the representative system may be, it is always the exclusive organ of the capitalist class.
- 3.** The proletariat cannot crush or modify the mechanism of capitalist production relations, source of its exploitation, without wrecking bourgeois power through violence.
- 4.** The class Party is the indispensable organ for the proletarian revolutionary struggle. The Communist Party consists of the most advanced and resolute part of the proletariat, unites the efforts of the working masses transforming their struggles for group interests and contingent issues into the general struggle for the revolutionary emancipation of the proletariat. Propagating the revolutionary theory among the masses, organising the material means of action, leading the working class all along its struggle, by securing the historical continuity and the international unity of the movement, are duties of the Party.
- 5.** After it has knocked down the power of the capitalist State, the proletariat must completely destroy the old State apparatus in order to organise itself as a ruling class and set up its own dictatorship. It will deny all functions and political rights to any individual of the bourgeois class as long as they survive socially, founding the organs of the new regime exclusively on the productive class. Such is the programme which the Communist Party sets itself and which is

characteristic of it. It is the Party alone which therefore represents, organises and directs the proletarian dictatorship. The necessary defence of the proletarian State against all counter-revolutionary attempts can only be secured by taking from the bourgeoisie and from all the parties, enemies of proletarian dictatorship, any means of agitation and political propaganda, and by the proletariat's armed organisation, able to repulse all internal and external attacks.

**6.** Only the force of the proletarian State will be able to put systematically into effect the necessary measures for intervening in the relations of the social economy, by means of which the collective management of production and distribution will take the place of the capitalist system.

**7.** This transformation of the economy and consequently of the whole social life will lead to the gradual elimination of the necessity for the political State which will progressively become an apparatus for the rational administration of human activities. In the face of the capitalist world and the workers' movement following the second World War the position of the Party is founded on the following points:

**8.** In the course of the first half of the twentieth century the capitalist social system has been developing, in the economic field, by creating monopolistic trusts among the employers, and by trying to control and to manage production and exchanges according to control plans with State management of whole sectors of production. In the political field, there has been an increase of the police and army potential of the State, all governments adopting a more totalitarian form. All these are neither new sorts of social organisations as a transition from capitalism to socialism, nor revivals of pre-bourgeois political regimes. On the contrary, they are definite forms of a more and more direct and exclusive management of power and State by the most developed forces of capital.

This course excludes the progressive, pacifist and evolutionist interpretations of the becoming of the bourgeois regime, and confirms the prevision of the concentration and of the antagonistic arraying of the class forces. The proletariat in order to confront its enemies' growing potential with strengthened revolutionary energy, must repel the illusory revival of democratic liberalism and constitutional guarantees. The Party must not even accept this as a means of agitation: it must historically get rid once and for all, of the practice of alliances, even for transitory issues, with the middle class as well as with the pseudo-proletarian and reformist parties.

**9.** The world imperialistic wars show that the crisis of disaggregation of capitalism is inevitable as it has entered the phase when its expansion, instead of signifying a continual increment of the productive forces, is conditioned by repeated and ever-growing destructions. These wars have caused repeated deep crises in the workers' world organisation because the dominant classes could impose on them military and national solidarity with one or another of the belligerents. The only historical alternative to be set against such a situation is the awakening of the internal

class struggle, until the civil war of the working masses to overthrow the power of all bourgeois states and of world coalitions, with the reconstitution of the International Communist Party as an autonomous force, independent of any organised political or military power.

**10.** The proletarian State, being its apparatus an instrument and a weapon for the struggle in a transition historical period, does not draw its force from constitutional canons and representative systems. The most complete historical example of such a State is up to the present that of the Soviets (workers' councils) which were created during the October 1917 Russian revolution, when the working class armed itself under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party alone; during the totalitarian seizure of power, the wiping out of the Constituent Assembly, the struggle to repulse the external attacks of bourgeois governments and to crush the internal rebellion of defeated classes, of middle and petty-bourgeois strata and of opportunist parties, inevitable allies of the counter-revolution at the decisive moment.

**11.** The integral realisation of socialism within the limits of one country is inconceivable and the socialist transformation cannot be carried out without insuccess and momentary set-backs. The defence of the proletarian regime against the ever-present dangers of degeneration is possible only if the proletarian State is always solidary with the international struggle of the working class of each country against its own bourgeoisie, its State and its army; this struggle permits of no respite even in wartime. This co-ordination can only be secured if the world communist Party controls the politics and programme of the States where the working class has vanquished.

## II. Tasks of the Communist Party

**1.** The proletariat can only free itself from the capitalist exploitation if it fights under a revolutionary political organ: the Communist Party.

**2.** The chief aspect of the political struggle in the Marxist sense is the civil war and the armed uprising by which a class overthrows the power of the opposed dominant class and sets up its own power. Such a struggle can only succeed if it is led by the Party organisation.

**3.** Neither the struggle against the power of the exploiting class nor the successive uprooting of the capitalist economic structures can be achieved without the political revolutionary party: the proletarian dictatorship is indispensable all along the historical period where such tremendous changes will take place and will be exercised openly by the Party.

**4.** The Party defends and propagates the theory of the movement for the socialist revolution; it defends and strengthens its inner organisation by propagating the communist theory and programme and by being constantly active in the rank of the proletariat wherever the latter is

forced to fight for its economic interests; such are its tasks before, during and after the struggle of the armed proletariat for state power.

**5.** The Party is not made up of all members of the proletariat or even of its majority. It is the organisation of the minority which has, collectively, reached and mastered revolutionary tactics in theory and in practice; in other words, which sees clearly the general objectives of the historic movement of the proletariat in the whole world and for the whole of the historical course which separates the period of its formation from that of its final victory. The Party is not formed on the basis of individual consciousness; it is not possible for each worker to become conscious and still less to master the class doctrine in a cultural way, neither is this possible for each militant nor even for the leaders of the Party as individuals. This consciousness lies in the organic unity of the Party.

Any conception which makes the progress of revolutionary emancipation of the working class derive from individual acts or on the contrary from mass action without a party framework must therefore be rejected. In the same way we must reject any conception of the party as a group of enlightened scholars or conscious individuals. On the contrary, the Party is the organic tissue whose function inside the working class is to carry out its revolutionary task in all its aspects and in its successive phases.

**6.** Marxism has always energetically rejected the theory which proposes to the proletariat only trade, industrial or factory associations, theory which considers that these associations can, by themselves, lead the class struggle to its historical end: the conquest of power and the transformation of society. Incapable of facing the immense task of the social revolution on its own, the union is however indispensable to mobilise the proletariat on a political and revolutionary level. This however is possible only if the Communist Party is present and its influence inside the union grows. The party can only work inside entirely proletarian unions where membership is voluntary and where no given political, religious or social opinions are forced on members. This is not the case with confessional unions, with those where membership is compulsory and with those which have become an integrant part of the State system.

The Party will never set up economic associations which exclude those workers who do not accept its principles and leadership. But the Party recognises without any reserve that not only the situation which precedes insurrectional struggle but also all phases of substantial growth of Party influence amongst the masses cannot arise without the expansion between the Party and the working class of a series of organisations with short term economic objectives with a large number of participants. Within such organisations the party will set a network of communist cells and groups, as well as a communist fraction in the union.

**7.** In periods when the working class is passive, the Party must anticipate the forms and promote the constitution of organisations with immediate economic aims. These may be unions grouped

according to trade, industry, factory committees or any other known grouping or even quite new organisations. The Party always encourages organisations which favour Contact between workers at different localities and different trades and their common action. It rejects all forms of closed organisations.

**8.** In any Situation, the Party refuses at the same time the idealist and utopist outlook which makes social transformation dependent on a circle of "elected" apostles and heroes; the libertarian outlook which makes it dependent on the revolt of individuals or unorganised masses; the trade union or economists' outlook which entrusts it to apolitical organisations, whether they preach the use of violence or not; the volunteeristic and sectarian outlook which does not recognise that class rebellion rises out of a series of collective actions well prior to a clear theoretical consciousness and even to resolute will action, and which, as a result, recommends the forming of a small "elite" isolated from working class trade unions or, which comes to the same, leaning on trade unions which exclude non communists. This last mistake, which has historically characterised the German K.A.P.D. and Dutch Tribunists [The members of Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (KAPD) in Germany and of the Dutch group of "Tribune" review, lead by Gorter and Pannekoek, that definitely abandoned the C.I. in 1921.], has always been fought against by the Marxist Italian Left.

The differences for reasons of strategy and tactics which led our current to break away from the IIIrd International cannot be discussed without reference to the different historical phases of the proletarian movement.

### III. Historical Waves of Opportunist Degeneration

**1.** It is impossible, unless we want to give way to idealism or to mystical, ethical or aesthetical considerations which are in complete opposition to Marxism, to assert that in all historical phases of the proletarian movement the same intransigence is necessary, that any alliance, any united front, all compromise is to be refused on principle. Quite on the contrary, it is only on a historical basis that questions of class and party strategy and tactics can be solved. For this reason, it is the development of the proletarian class throughout the world between the bourgeois and the socialist revolutions which must be considered, and not particularities of time and place that nourish casuistical politics and which leave practical questions to the whim of groups or steering committees.

**2.** The proletariat itself is above all the product of capitalist economy and industrialisation; like communism it cannot be born of the inspiration of individuals, brotherhoods or political clubs, but only of the struggle of the proletarians themselves. In the same way, the irrevocable victory of capitalism over those forms which have preceded it historically, that is the victory of the bourgeoisie over the feudal and land-owning aristocracy and over the other classes characteristic

of the old regime, be it Asiatic or European or of other continents, is a condition for communism.

At the time of the Communist Manifesto, modern industrial development was still at its beginnings and present only in a very few countries. In order to speed up the explosion of modern class struggle, the proletariat had to be encouraged to struggle, armed, at the sides of the revolutionary bourgeoisies during the antifeudal insurrections or those of national liberation. In this way the workers' participation in the great French revolution and its defence against the European coalitions right up to napoleonic times, is part of the history of the workers' struggle and this in spite of the fact that from the very beginning the bourgeois dictatorship ferociously quelled the first communist inspired social struggles.

Because of the defeat of the bourgeois revolutions of 1848, this strategy of alliance between proletariat and bourgeoisie against the classes of the old regime valid, in the eyes of Marxists, until 1871, in view of the fact that this feudal regime still persists in Russia, in Austria and in Germany and that the national unity of Italy, Germany and the east European countries is a necessary condition of Europe's industrial development.

**3.** 1871 is a clear turning-point in history. The struggle against Napoleon III and his dictatorship is in fact directed against a capitalistic and not a feudal form; it is at the same time the product and proof of the mobilisation of the two fundamental and enemy classes of modern society. Although it sees in Napoleon an obstacle to the bourgeois development of Germany, revolutionary Marxism goes immediately on the side of the anti- bourgeois struggle which will be that of all parties of the Commune, first workers' dictatorship in history. After this date, the proletariat can no longer choose between contending parties or national armies in so far as any restoration of pre-bourgeois forms has become socially impossible in two big areas: Europe to the confines of the Ottoman and tsarist empires on the one hand, and England and North America on the other.

## **A. Opportunism at the end of the 19th Century**

**4.** If we disregard Bakouninism during the first, International and Sorelism during the second, as they have nothing to do with Marxism, the social-democratic revisionism represents the first opportunist wave within the proletarian Marxist movement. Its vision was the following: once victory by the bourgeoisie over the old regime was universally secured, a historical phase without insurrections and without wars opens up before humanity; socialism becomes possible by gradual evolution and without violence, on the basis of the extension of modern industry and due to the numerical increase of workers armed with universal suffrage. In this way it was tried (Bernstein) to empty Marxism of its revolutionary contents, pretending that its rebellious spirit was inherited from the revolutionary bourgeoisie and not belonging to the proletarian class in



itself. At this time, the tactical question of alliance between advanced bourgeois parties and the proletarian party takes on a different aspect to that of the preceding phase; it is no longer a question of helping capitalism to win, but to make socialism derive from it with the help of laws and reform, no longer to fight on the barricades of the towns and in the country against menaces of restoration; but only to vote together in parliamentary assemblies. That is why the proposal of alliances and coalition and even the acceptance of ministerial posts by workers' representatives is from then on a deviation from the revolutionary path. That is also why radical Marxists reprove all electoral coalition.

## **B. Opportunism in 1914**

**5.** The second tremendous opportunist wave hits the proletarian movement when war breaks out in 1914. Most of the parliamentary and trade-union leaders as well as strong militant groups, and in some countries whole parties present the conflict between national States as a struggle which might bring back the absolutism of the feudal system and which might lead to the destruction of the conquests of the bourgeois civilisation and even of modern productive system. They preach solidarity with the national State at war, the result of which is an alliance between Tsarist Russia and the advanced bourgeoisies of France and England.

The majority of the Second International therefore falls into the war opportunism from which very few parties, one of which is the Italian socialist party, escape. Worse, only advanced groups and fractions accept the position of Lenin who, having defined the war as being a product of capitalism and not a conflict between the latter and less advanced politico-social forms, draws the conclusion that the "holy union" must be condemned and that the proletarian party should practise a defeatist revolutionary policy within each country against the belligerent State and army.

**6.** The Third International rises on such historical position, against both social democratism and social- patriotism. In the Communist International, not only are no alliances concluded with other parties for parliamentary power, not only is it denied that power may be assumed by legal means, even if in an "intransigent" way [Here is referred to the "intransigence" displayed by the Italian Socialist Party that only consisted in refusing a parliamentary support to bourgeois governments, but which did not explicitly exclude the possibility of a legal and gradual ascent to power.], by the only workers' party, but all agree that the past idyllic phase of capitalism must be followed by armed violence and dictatorship.

No alliances are concluded with the governments at war - even a "defensive" war, upholding a class position even in this case -- but all efforts are made by defeatist propaganda on the front to turn the imperialistic war between States into a civil war between classes.

**7.** The revolutionary reply to the first wave of opportunism had been: no electoral,



parliamentary or ministerial alliance to obtain reforms. The reply to the second was, since 1871: no war alliance with the State and bourgeoisie. The fact that these reactions came with a big delay prevented the proletariat from making full use of the turning point and crisis of 1914-18 and of setting up the struggle against war and for the destruction of the bourgeois State.

**8.** There was only one exception, an imposing one: the October 1917 victory in Russia. Russia was the only remaining great European State still ruled by feudal power where capitalist forms of production had as yet penetrated but little. The proletarian party was numerically weak, but it had a tradition of doctrinal steadfastness and had been in opposition to the two consecutive waves of opportunism in the Second International. At the same time it had been capable, from 1905 onwards, of setting down the problems put by the simultaneous development of a bourgeois and a proletarian revolution.

In February 1917, the proletarian party struggled with the others against Tsarism, but in the phase which immediately followed, it was forced to fight not only against the bourgeois liberal party but also against the proletarian opportunist ones, which had openly gone over to the enemy, and it triumphed over all of them. It then became the centre of the reconstitution of the revolutionary International.

**9.** The effect of this formidable event is to be found in irrevocable historical results. In the last European country placed outside of the geo-political area of the West, an uninterrupted fight leads a proletariat, whose social development is far from being complete, to power. Liberal-democratic forms of the western type, set up during the first phase of the revolutions are brushed aside and the proletarian dictatorship faces the immense task of accelerating economic development. This means that the still present feudal forms must be overthrown and that the recent capitalistic forms must be overcome. The realisation of this task calls above all for victory over the gangs of counter-revolutionary insurgents and the intervention of foreign capitalism. It calls not only for the mobilisation of the world proletariat for the defence of soviet power and to direct the assault on the western, bourgeois powers, but for the extension of the revolutionary struggle to continents inhabited by coloured people, in short the mobilisation of all forces able to carry on an armed fight against white capitalist metropolises.

**10.** In Europe and America strategical alliance with left bourgeois movements against feudal forms of power is no longer possible and has given way to direct struggle by the proletariat for power. But in underdeveloped countries the rising proletarian and communist parties will not disdain to participate to insurrections of other anti-feudal classes, either against local despotic dominations or against the white colonisers.

In Lenin's time, there are two historical alternatives: either the world struggle ends in victory, that is by the downfall of capitalistic power at least in a large advanced part of Europe, and this would permit Russian economy to be transformed at a fast rhythm, "jumping" the capitalistic

stage and quickly catching up with Western industry, already ripe for socialism, or the big imperialist centres stay put, and in this case the revolutionary Russian power is forced to restrain itself to the economic task of the bourgeois revolution, making the effort of immense productive development, but of a capitalistic, not a socialist character.

**11.** It was quite obvious that only a quick grasp of power in Europe could prevent the violent fall of the Soviet State, or its involution into a capitalistic State within a historically short time. However, after the serious shock following the First World War, the bourgeois society was quickly consolidated, the communist parties having failed to be victorious, except for a few attempts which were rapidly crushed. This lead the communist parties to ask themselves by which means they could ward off the social democratic and opportunist influences which continued to exert pressure on large sections of the proletariat.

There were then two methods at strife: the first -- that of the Italian Marxist Left -- considered that those parties of the Second International which openly continued an unrelenting struggle at the same time against the communist programme and against revolutionary Russia, and it fought them on a class front as being the most dangerous enemy detachment; the other consisted of falling back on devices, strategical and tactical "manoeuvres" to turn the masses influenced by the social democratic parties, towards the communist party.

**12.** To justify the latter method the experiences of the Bolshevik policy in Russia were falsely explained, diverging from the correct theoretical line. In Russia the offers of alliance with petit-bourgeois and even bourgeois parties were historically justified by the fact that by banning all these movements Tsarism compelled them to an insurrectional struggle. In Europe, on the contrary, even when proposed purely as a manoeuvre, common action was only to be carried on legal lines, be it on trade-union or parliamentary ground. In Russia, the phase of liberal parliamentarism had been very short (the year 1905 and a few months in 1917) and the same goes for legal recognition of the trade union movement. In the rest of Europe, instead, half a century of degeneration of the proletarian movement had made these two fields of action propitious ground to drowse revolutionary energies and corrupt the workers' leaders. The guarantee lying in the firmness of the Bolshevik Party in its principles and its organisation was one thing, while that given, according to Moscow, by the existence of a revolutionary power in Russia was quite another, as owing to the social conditions under which it came into being and to the international relations, this power was precisely the proletarian organism which lay most open (history has but shown it too well) to the renunciation of revolutionary principles and policy.

**13.** The left of the International (to which the great majority of the Communist Party of Italy belonged before it was more or less destroyed by the fascist counter- revolution which was favoured chiefly by the mistake of historical strategy) upheld that in the West all alliances or proposals of alliances with socialist or petit-bourgeois parties should be refused at all costs; in

other words that there should be no united political front. It admitted that the communists should widen their influence within the masses by taking part in all local and economic struggles, calling on the workers of all organisations and of all faiths to develop them to the maximum, but it refused that the party's action should be subordinated to that of political committees of fronts, coalitions or alliances even if this subordination was to restrict itself to public declarations and be compensated by internal instructions to militants or the party and by the subjective intentions of the leaders. Even more strongly it rejected the so-called "Bolshevik" tactics when it took the shape of "workers' government", i.e. the launching of the slogan (become in some instances a practical experiment, with ruinous consequences) of coming into the parliamentary power with mixed majorities of communists and socialists of the various shapes. If the Bolshevik party could draw up with no danger the plan of provisional governments of several parties in the revolutionary phase, and if that allowed it to go to the firmest autonomy of action and even to outlaw the former allies, all that was made possible only by the diversity of situation of the historical forces: urgent need of two revolutions, and destructive attitude, by the State in force, towards any coming to power through a parliamentary way. It would have been absurd to transpose such a strategy to a situation in which the bourgeois State has a half a century hold democratic tradition, and parties that accept its constitutionalism.

**14.** The results of tactics applied by the communist International between 1921 and 1926 were negative, which did not stop the latter from advocating more and more opportunistic methods between the IIIrd and Vth International Congresses and the Enlarged Executive Committee in 1926. The Communist International's method was, to change its tactics according to situations which were analysed in a most whimsical fashion, new stages of capitalism being discovered every six months. The C.I.'s revisionism lay, at the bottom, essentially in this voluntarism which it had in common with all preceding revisionisms. Reformists in 1900 already reasoned thus: from now on the situation excludes all possibility of insurrection; let us not wait for the impossible, let us try to achieve concrete reforms by legal means, economic conquests by using the trade unions. The failure of this method provoked reaction from the anarchosindicalist current which was also voluntarist. Surprise attacks from bold minorities were substituted for political party struggle under the pretension that the political course could be determined and the general strike imposed on the D-day. In the same way, seeing that the West-European proletariat did not attack the bourgeois State, the Communist International fell back on devices, which of course modified neither the objective situation nor the balance of power but only weakened and corrupted the workers' organisation. The confusion between the communist programme of revolutionary taking of power and the support or participation by the communists in "workers" governments, springing from parliamentary majorities, reduced the effects of Lenin's restoration of revolutionary principles to nothing and disarmed the world proletarian party ideologically with no other practical effects than the ludicrous experience of Saxony and Thuringia where two policemen were enough to overthrow the government communist leader.

**15.** The confusion in matters of internal organisation compromised no less the success of the difficult task of selecting the revolutionary members from the opportunist ones in the different parties and countries. The error consisted in believing that the left wings torn away from the Old social democratic parties would make forces of the communist party easy to handle, whereas in fact they could but keep up the permanent crisis within the communist organisation. Under the pretext of winning over large groups of workers, compromises were made with the leaders, continually changing the people holding responsibility and this even when engaged in active struggle, when continuity in organisation was more than ever essential. Instead of demanding individual membership to the sections (the new International once constituted was to function in a continuous, stable manner as world Party), mergers were arranged with fractions and groups from opportunist parties calling themselves "communist" wiping out frontiers between followers and enemies of communism, breaking the continuity of action of the revolutionary party and recording therefore nothing but failures on an international scale. The Left always claimed unity and continuity of the Communist organisation in the face of all these dissolving practices.

The overthrow of the structure of the parties under the pretext of "bolshevisation" was another reason for the Left to differ from the leadership of the International. The territorial organisation of the party was changed for a network of factory cells. This narrowed the political horizon of the members who had the same trade and therefore the same immediate economic interests. In this way, the natural synthesis of the different social impulses which would have helped to make the struggle a general one, common to all categories, was not achieved. As this synthesis was lacking, the only factor of unity was represented by the top executives whose members became in this way officials with all the negative characteristics of the old socialist party system.

The criticism which the Italian Marxist Left made of this organisation must not be mistaken as claiming the return to "internal democracy" and to "free election" of the party leaders. It is neither internal democracy nor free elections which give the Party its nature of being the most conscious fraction of the proletariat and its function of revolutionary guide. It is instead the matter of a deep discrepancy of conceptions about the deterministic organicity of the party as a historical body, living in the reality of the class struggle; it is a fundamental deviation in principles, that made the parties unable to foresee and face the opportunist danger.

**16.** Analogous deviations took place in Russia where, for the first time in history, the difficult problem of organisation and internal discipline of the communist party which had come to power and whose membership had enormously increased, arose. The difficulties met in the internal social-struggle for a new economy and revolutionary political struggle outside of Russia provoked contrasting opinions between Bolsheviks of the Old Guard and new members. The Party's leading group had in its hands not only the party apparatus but also the whole State apparatus. Its opinions or those of the majority within it were made good not by means of party doctrine and its national and international tradition of struggle, but by repression of the

opposition by means of the State apparatus and by strangling the party in a police like manner. All disobedience towards the central organ of the party was judged as a counter-revolutionary act warranting, besides expulsion, punitive sanctions. The relationship between Party and State was thus completely distorted and the group which controlled both was thus able to enforce a series of surrenders of principles and of the historical line of the party and world revolutionary movement. In reality the party is a unitary organism in its doctrine and its action. To join the party imposes peremptory obligations on Leaders and followers. But joining and leaving is voluntary without any kind of physical compulsion and shall be so before, during and after the conquest of power. The party directs alone and in an autonomous way the struggle of the exploited class to destroy the capitalist State. In the same way, the Party, alone and autonomous, leads the revolutionary proletarian State, and just because the State is, historically, a transitory organ, legal intervention against party members or groups is a pointer to a serious crisis. As soon as such intervention became a practice in Russia, the party became crowded with opportunistic members who sought nothing more than to procure advantages for themselves or at least to benefit from the protection of the Party. Yet they were accepted without hesitation and instead of a weakening of the State there was a dangerous inflation of the Party in power.

This reversal of influences resulted in the opportunists getting the upper hand on the orthodox; the betrayers of revolutionary principles paralysed, immobilised, accused and finally condemned those who defended them in a coherent way, some of whom had understood too late that the party would never again become a revolutionary one.

In fact, it was the government, at grips with the hard reality of internal and external affairs, which solved questions, and imposed its solutions on the Party. The latter, in turn, had an easy time in international congresses to impose these solutions on the other parties which it dominated and handled as it liked. In this way the directive of the Comintern lines became more and more eclectic and conciliatory with respect to world capitalism. The Italian Left never questioned the revolutionary merits of the party which had lead the first proletarian revolution to victory, but it maintained that the contributions of the parties still openly struggling against their bourgeois regime, were indispensable. The hierarchy which could solve the problems of revolutionary action in the world and in Russia must therefore be the following: the International of the World communist parties -- its various sections, including the Russian one -- finally the communist government for internal Russian politics but exclusively along party lines. Otherwise the internationalist character of the movement and its revolutionary efficiency could not but be compromised.

Only by respecting this rule could a divergence of interests and objectives between the Russian State and the World revolution be avoided. Lenin himself had many times admitted that if the revolution broke out in Europe or the world, the Russian party would take not second but at least fourth place in the general political and social leadership of the communist revolution.

**17.** We cannot say exactly when the opportunistic wave which was to bear away the Communist International, originated. This was the third wave, the first having paralysed the International founded by Marx and the second which had shamefully brought about the fall of the Second International. The deviations and political errors discussed in paragraphs 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 above, threw the world communist movement into total opportunism which could be seen from its attitude towards fascism and totalitarian governments. These forms appeared after the period of the great proletarian attacks which, in Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bavaria and in the Balkan States, followed the end of the Ist World War. The communist International defined them as employers' offensives with a tendency to lower the standard of living of the working classes economically, and politically as initiatives aiming at the suppression of democratic liberalism, which it presented, in a turn of phrase doubtful to Marxists, as being a favourable milieu for a proletarian offensive, whereas communism has always considered it as the worst possible atmosphere of revolutionary corruption on the political level. In reality, fascism was the complete proof of the Marxist vision of history: the economic concentration was not only evidence of the social and international character of capitalist production, but it urged the latter to unite and the bourgeoisie to declare Social war on the proletariat, whose pressure was as yet much weaker than the defence capacity of the capitalist State.

The leaders of the International on the other hand created serious historical confusion with the Kerensky period in Russia, leading not only to a serious mistake in theoretical interpretation, but to an inevitable overthrow of tactics. A strategy for the defence and conservation of existing conditions was outlined for the proletariat and communist Parties, advising them to form a united front with all those bourgeois groups which upheld that certain immediate advantages should be granted to the workers and that the people should not be deprived of their democratic rights. The groups were in this way much less decided and perspicacious than the fascists and thus very feeble allies.

The International did not understand that Fascism or National Socialism had nothing to do with an attempt to return to despotic and feudal forms of government, nor with the victory of the so-called right-wing bourgeois sections in opposition with the more advanced capitalist class from the big industries, nor an attempt to form an autonomous government of the intermediate classes between employers and proletariat. It did not understand either that freeing itself from a hypocritical parliamentarism, fascism inherited on the other hand wholly the pseudo- Marxist reformism, securing for the least fortunate classes not only a living wage but a series of improvements of their welfare by means of a certain number of measures and state interventions taken, of course, in the interest of the State. The Communist International thus launched the slogan "struggle for freedom" which was forced upon the Communist Party of Italy by the president of the International from 1926 onwards. Yet nearly all the militants of the party had wanted for four years to lead as autonomous class policy against fascism refusing coalition with all democratic, monarchistic and catholic parties in favour of constitutional and parliamentary



guarantees. And it was in vain that the Italian Left warned the leaders of the International that the path it had chosen (and which ended finally with the Committees for National Liberation!) would lead to the loss of all revolutionary energies, and demanded that the real meaning of the antifascism of all the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois parties as well as the pseudo-proletarian ones should be openly denounced.

The line of the communist party is by its nature an offensive one and in no case may it struggle for the illusory preservation of conditions peculiar to capitalism. If, before 1871, the working class had to fight side by side with bourgeois forces, this was not in order to hold on to certain advantages, nor to avoid an impossible return to old times but in order to help in the total destruction of all out-grown political and social forms. In everyday economic policy, just as in general politics, the working class had nothing to lose and therefore nothing to defend. Attack and Conquest, those are its only tasks.

Consequently, the revolutionary party shall interpret the coming of totalitarian forms of capitalism as the confirmation of its doctrine and therefore its complete ideological victory. It shall take an interest in the effective strength of the proletarian class in relationship to its oppressor in order to get ready for the revolutionary civil war. This relationship has ever been made unfavourable only by opportunism and gradualism. The revolutionary party shall do all in its power to stir up the final attack, and where this is impossible, face up without ever slating a "Vade retro Satana", as defeatist as stupid because it comes to begging foolishly for tolerance and pardon from the enemy class.

### **C. Opportunism after 1926**

**18.** In the Second International, opportunism took on the form of humanitarianism, philanthropy and pacifism culminating in the repudiation of armed struggle and insurrection and, what is more, finding justification for legal violence between States at war. During the third opportunist wave deviation and treason of the revolutionary line went as far as armed fighting and civil war. But even when opportunism wants to impose a given government against another in one country by means of an armed struggle aiming at territorial conquests and strategical positions, the revolutionary criticism remains the same as when it organises fronts, blocks and alliances with purely electoral and parliamentary designs. For instance the alliance of the Spanish Civil War and the partisan movement against the Germans or the fascists during the Second World War was without doubt betrayal of the working class and a form of collaboration with capitalism, in spite of the violence which was made use of. In such cases, the communist party's refusal to subordinate itself to committees made up of heterogeneous parties should be even firmer: when action passes from legal agitation to conspiracy and fighting it is still more criminal to have anything what so ever in common with non proletarian movements. We need not recall that in the case of defeat, such collusions were concluded by the concentration of all the enemy's forces

on the communists, whereas in the case of apparent success, the revolutionary wing was completely disarmed and bourgeois order was consolidated.

**19.** All demonstrations of opportunism in the tactics imposed on European parties and carried on inside Russia were crowned during the Second World War by the attitude of the Soviet State towards the other belligerent States and by the instructions which Moscow gave to the communist parties. The latter did not deny their assent to the war, nor did they try to exploit it in order to organise class action aiming at the destruction of the capitalist State. On the contrary, in a first stage Russia concluded an agreement with Germany: then while it provided that the German section should do nothing against the hitlerite power, it dared to dictate self-styled "Marxist" tactics to French communists who were to declare the war of the French and English bourgeoisie as being an imperialistic aggressive one, and made these parties lead illegal action against their State and army; However, as soon as the Russian State came into military conflict with Germany and its interest lay in the strength of those opposed to the Russian state, the French, English and other parties concerned received the opposite political instruction and the order to move to the front of national defence just like the socialists, denounced by Lenin, in 1914. Much more, all theoretical and historical positions of communism were falsified when it was declared that the war between the western powers and Germany was not an imperialistic one but a crusade for liberty and democracy and that it had been so from the start, from 1939 on, when the pseudo-communist propaganda was entirely directed against the French and English.

Thus it is clear that the Communist International, which at one time had been formally wiped out in order to give extra guarantees to the imperialist powers, was at no time used to provoke the fall of any capitalist power and not even to speed on the appearance of conditions necessary for the taking over of power by the proletariat. Its only use was to collaborate openly with the German imperialist bloc, the opposite bloc having preferred to do without its help when Russia came over on its side.

It is therefore not a simple question of opportunism but rather a total abandonment of communism, proved by the haste with which the definition of the class structure of the bourgeois powers changed at the same time as did Russia's allies. Imperialist and plutocrat in 1939-40, France, England and America later became representative of progress, freedom and civilisation, having a common programme with Russia for the reorganisation of the world. This extraordinary turning did not prevent Russia from the moment of the first disagreements in 1946 and from the start of the cold war, to heap the most fiery accusations on the very same States.

It is no wonder therefore that, beginning by simple contacts with the social-betrayers and social-patriots rejected the day before, continuing with united fronts, workers' governments (renouncing to class dictatorship) and even blocs with petit-bourgeois parties, the Moscow movement fell, during the war, into total enslavement of the policy of the "democratic powers". Later it had to admit that these powers were not only imperialist but just as fascist as Germany



and Italy had been before. It is therefore no wonder either that the revolutionary parties which had met in Moscow in 1919-1920 had lost any remainder of their communist and proletarian nature.

**20.** The Third historical wave of opportunism unites all the characteristics of the two preceding ones in the same measure as present capitalism includes all forms of its different stages of development.

After the second imperialist war, the opportunist parties, united with all the bourgeois parties in the Committees of National Liberation take a part in government with them. In Italy, they even partake in monarchist cabinets, postponing the question of the Republic to more "suitable" times. Thus they repudiate the use of the revolutionary method for the conquest of political powers by the proletariat, sanctioning a purely legal and parliamentary struggle to which all proletarian pressure is to be sacrificed in view of the conquest of public power by pacific means. In the same way as during the first year of the conflict they did not sabotage fascist governments, nourishing their military strength the supply of first necessity, they postulate the participation in national defence governments sparing all trouble to the governments at war.

Opportunism continues its fatal evolution, sacrificing, even formally, the Third International to the enemy of the working class, to subsequent imperialism, in favour of the subsequent "reinforcement of the United Front of the allies and other United Nations". Thus the historical anticipation of the Italian Left made in the first years of the Third International came true. It was ineluctable that the gigantic opportunism which had gained the workers' movement would lead to the liquidation of all revolutionary instances. Consequently the reconstitution of the class strength of the world proletariat has been very much delayed, made more difficult and will require a greater effort.

**21.** In the same way as Russia, supported by the opportunist communist parties of other countries, had fought on the side of the imperialists, she joined them in the occupation of the vanquished countries to prevent the exploited masses from rising, and this without losing the parties' support. On the contrary, this occupation with counter-revolutionary purpose was fully justified by all the so-called socialists and communists during the Yalta and Teheran conferences. Any possibility of a revolutionary attack of the bourgeois powers was reduced to nothing in the countries that had won the war as in those that had lost. This confirms the position of the Italian Left which regarded the second War as imperialist and the occupation of the vanquished countries as counter-revolutionary, and foresaw that the second war could not be followed by a revolutionary revival.

**22.** In accordance with the counter-revolutionary past the Russian and affiliated parties have modernised the theory of the permanent collaboration between classes proclaiming the peaceful co-existence and competition between capitalist and socialist States. This position, after the

former which reduced the class struggle to a so-called struggle between socialist and capitalist States, is their final insult to revolutionary Marxism. If a socialist State does not declare a holy war on capitalist States, it at least declares and maintains the class war inside the bourgeois countries, whose proletariat prepares theoretically and practically for the insurrection. This is the only position which conforms with the programme of the communist parties who do not disdain to show their opinions and their intentions (Manifesto of 1846) and openly urge on the violent destruction of the bourgeois power.

Hence, States and parties which admit or even assume hypothetically peaceful coexistence and competition between States instead of propagandising the absolute incompatibility among the classes and armed struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat, are capitalist States and counter-revolutionary parties, and their phraseology only masks their non-proletarian character.

The Persistence of such ideologies within the working class movement is a tragical holdback of any class revival and the proletariat must pass beyond them before the class struggle can take place.

**23.** Another aspect which made the political opportunism of the third wave still more shameful than the preceding ones was its shameful attitude towards pacifism, defence of guerrilla warfare; pacifism again, but spiced with the anti-capitalist phraseology of the cold war and finally the insipid total pacifism of coexistence. All these turnings went side by side with the most scandalous variation in the definition of the English and American powers: imperialist in 1939, democratically "liberating" the European proletariat in 1942, imperialist again after the war, pacifist rivals in the competition between capitalism and "socialism" today. True Marxists know, that the American imperialism has taken up since the first World War from the English "despot" the role of principal white guard of the world, as Lenin and the Third International many times emphasised during the glorious period of revolutionary struggle.

Inseparable from social pacifism, pacifism taken on its own makes the most of the workers' hatred of imperialist wars. Defence of peace which is a common propaganda of all parties and all States, bourgeois or pseudo-proletarian is however as opportunist as is the defence of the fatherland. Revolutionaries should leave one as the other to the UNO which is horror struck at the mention of class struggle, but is itself, like the League of Nations, a league of Robbers.

In putting pacifism higher than any other demand, today's opportunists show not only that they are outside the revolutionary process and have fallen into total utopia, but that they do not come within reach of the utopists Saint Simon, Owen, Fourier and even Proudhon. Revolutionary Marxism rejects pacifism as a theory and means of propaganda and subordinates peace to the violent destruction of world imperialism; there will be no peace as long as the proletariat of the world is not free from bourgeois exploitation. It also denounces pacifism as a weapon of the class enemy to disarm the proletariat and withhold them from revolutionary

influence.

**24.** Throwing bridges to the imperialist parties to set up governments of "national union" has now become a customary praxis of the opportunists who carry it out on an international scale in a gigantic superstate organism, U.N.O. The great lie consists in making believe that provided that the war between States is avoided, class collaboration can not only become reality but bring its mawkish fruits to the working class, the imperialist and class State becoming a democratic instrument for the public wealth.

Thus in the Peoples' Democracies, the opportunists have set up national systems in which all social classes are represented, with the pretence that in this way their opposing interests can be harmonised. In China for instance where the four class block is in power, the proletariat, far from having assumed political power, is subjected to the incessant pressure of the young industrial capitalism, having born the cost of "National Reconstruction" just like the proletariats of the other countries. The disarmament of the revolutionary forces, which was offered to the bourgeoisie by the social- patriots of 1914 and the ministerialists such as Millerand, Bissolati, Vandervelde, MacDonald and Company who were fustigated and eliminated by Lenin and the Communist International, grows blurred in the face of the scandalous and impudent collaboration of the present social patriots and ministerialists. The Italian Left which already in 1922 was opposed to the "workers' and peasant government" (password which was given the meaning of "dictatorship of the proletariat" but which fostered a fatal ambiguity or worse meant something quite different) rejects all the more the open class collaboration which present day opportunists do not hesitate to advocate; the Italian Left claims for the proletariat and its party the unconditional monopoly of the State, the unitary and undivided dictatorship of the proletarian class.

## IV. PARTY ACTION

**1.** Since its birth, capitalism has had an irregular historical development, with alternating periods of crisis and intense economic expansion.

Crises are inseparable from capitalism which will not however cease to grow and to expand so long as the revolutionary forces will not deal it the final blow. In a parallel way, the history of the proletarian movement presents phases of impetuous bounds and phases of withdrawal provoked by brutal defeats or slow degeneracy during which the renewal of revolutionary activity may be decades away. The Paris Commune was violently put down and its defeat opened a period of relatively pacific development of capitalism which gave birth to revisionist or opportunistic theories whose very existence proved the falling back of the revolution. The October revolution was slowly defeated over a period of regression, culminating in the violent suppression of those who had fought for it and survived. Since 1917, the revolution is very

much absent and today it does not look as though we are on the threshold of the renewal of revolutionary revival.

**2.** In spite of such recurrences, the capitalist mode of production expands and prevails in all countries, under its technical and social aspects, in a more or less continuous way. The alternatives of the clashing class forces are instead connected to the events of the general historical struggle, to the contrast that already existed when bourgeoisie began its rule on the feudal and precapitalistic classes, and to the evolutive political process of the two historical rival classes, bourgeoisie and proletariat; being such a process marked by victories and defeats, by errors of tactical and strategical method. The first clashes go back to 1789, arriving, through 1848, 1871, 1905 and 1917, to the present day; they gave the bourgeoisie a chance to furbish its arms against the proletariat in the same measure as its economy developed.

On the contrary, the proletariat, in the face of the gigantic extension of capitalism, has not always known how to use its class energy with success, falling back, after each defeat, into the net of opportunism and treason, and staying back from the revolution for an ever lengthening period.

**3.** The cycle of victorious struggles and of defeats, even the most drastic ones, and the opportunistic waves during which the revolutionary movement is submitted to the influence of the enemy class constitute a vast field of positive experiences where the revolution matures.

After the defeats, the revolutionary comeback is long and difficult; but the movement, although it is not visible on the surface, is not interrupted, it maintains, crystallised in a restricted vanguard, the revolutionary class demands.

The periods of political depression of the revolutionary movement are numerous. From 1848 to 1867, from the Second Paris revolution to the eve of the franco-prussian war, the revolutionary movement is nearly exclusively incarnated in Marx, Engels and a small circle of comrades; from 1872 to 1879, from the defeat of the Commune to the beginning of the colonial wars and the return of the capitalist crisis which leads to the Russian-Japanese war of 1905, and then to the 1914 war, the conscience of the revolution is represented by Marx and Engels. From 1914 to 1918 during the first World War during which the Second International crumbles, it is Lenin with some comrades of few other countries, who represent the continuity and victorious progression of the movement.

1926 introduced a new unfavourable period for the revolution which saw the liquidation of the October victory. Only the Italian Left communist movement has maintained intact the theory of revolutionary Marxism and the promise of a revolutionary come-back can have crystallised in this movement alone. During the second World War the conditions became still worse, the whole proletariat adhering to the imperialist war and the false Stalinistic socialism.

Today we are at the bottom of the depression and a come-back of the revolutionary movement cannot be envisaged in the near future. The length of the period of depression which we are experiencing corresponds to the seriousness of the degeneration as well as to the greater concentration of the capitalist forces. The third opportunistic wave unites the worst characteristics of the two preceding ones at the same time as the process of capitalist concentration in which the enemies strength lies is much stronger than after the first World War.

**4.** Today, in spite of depression and the limitation of the means of action at its disposal, the party, following the revolutionary tradition, has no intention of renouncing the historical preparation of the resumption on a large scale of the class struggle, which more formidable than all preceding ones, will profit by past experience. Restriction to activity does not imply the renouncement of revolutionary objectives. The party admits that in certain sectors its activity is quantitatively reduced, but it intends as far as possible to fulfil all its different tasks, and it does not renounce to any of them.

**5.** The principal activity today is the re-establishment of the theory of Marxist communism. At present, our arm is still that of criticism: therefore the party will bring forward no new theory, but will reaffirm the full validity of the fundamental theses of revolutionary Marxism, amply confirmed by facts and falsified and betrayed by opportunism to cover up retreats and defeats. The Marxist Left denounces and combats the Stalinists as revisionists and opportunists just as it has always condemned all forms of bourgeois influence on the proletariat. The Party bases its action on anti-revisionist positions. From the very moment of its appearance on the political scene, Lenin fought against Bernstein's revisionism and restored the original line, demolishing the factors of the two revisions -- social democratic and social patriotic.

The Italian Left denounced from the very start the first tactical deviations inside the Third International as being the first symptoms of a third revision, which has been fully accomplished today, uniting the errors of the first two.

The proletariat is the last class to be exploited in history and no system of exploitation will follow capitalism: this is the very reason why the doctrine which is born with the proletariat itself can be neither changed nor reformed. The development of capitalism from its origin up to now has confirmed and confirms the Marxist theorems laid out in the fundamental texts of the proletarian party. The last 40 years have brought nothing new and all that they have "taught" us, is that capitalism has a tough skin and that it must be overthrown. The central focus point of the actual doctrinal position of our movement is therefore the following: no revision whatsoever of the primary principles of the proletarian revolution.

**6.** Today, the party registers social phenomena scientifically in order to confirm the fundamental theses of Marxism. It analyses, confronts and comments on recent and contemporary facts, repudiating the doctrinal elaboration tending to found new theories or to indicate the

insufficiency of Marxism as an explanation of the phenomena.

The same work, demolition of opportunism and deviationism as accomplished by Lenin (and defined in "What is to be done") is still at the basis of our party activity thus following the example of militants of past periods of setback of the proletarian movement and of reinforcement of opportunist theories, that found in Marx, Engels, Lenin and in the Italian Left, violent and inflexible enemies.

**7.** Although small in number and having but few bounds with the proletarian masses, in fact jealously attached to its theoretical tasks, which are of prime importance, the Party, because of this true appreciation of its revolutionary duties in the present period, refuses to become a circle of thinkers or of those searching for new truths, of "renovators" considering as insufficient the past truth, and absolutely refuses to be considered as such.

No movement can triumph in the historical reality without theoretical continuity, which is the condensation of the experience of past struggles. Consequently, the Party denies anyone claiming to be Marxist the liberty to elaborate (or better to lucubrate) new schemes or explanations of the contemporary social world. No member of the Party, be he the most highly formed intellectually, has the liberty individually to make analyses, critics or perspectives: the Party defends the integrity of a theory which is not the product of a blind faith but the very science of the proletariat, edified with secular materials, not by thinkers but by history itself reflected in the historical conscience of the revolutionary class and crystallised in the revolutionary party: facts have but confirmed the doctrine of revolutionary Marxism.

**8.** In spite of the small number of members which corresponds to the counter-revolutionary conditions, the Party continues its work of proselytism and of oral and written propaganda, it considers the writing and the distribution of its press as its principal activity in the actual phase, being one of the most effective means (in a situation where there are few and far between) to show the masses the political line they are to follow and diffuse systematically and more widely the principles of the revolutionary movement.

**9.** It is events, and not the desire or the decision of militants, which determine the depth of the Party's penetration amongst the masses; limiting it today to a small part of its activity, the Party loses no occasion to intervene in clashes and vicissitudes of the class struggle, well aware that there can be no restart so long as this intervention has not greatly developed and even, has not become the dominant form of Party action.

**10.** The acceleration of the process depends not only on deep social causes, that is to say historical crises, but also on the proselytism and propaganda of the party, even with the reduced means at its disposal. The party excludes the possibility of stimulating this process by devices and manoeuvres towards groups, leaders or parties which usurp the title of proletarian, socialist or communist. These manoeuvres, typical of the tactics of the Third International at a time when



Lenin was obliged to retire from political life, had no other results than to break it up as a theory and as an organised force, each "tactical experiment" adding to the disintegration of the party. We therefore leave it to the Trotskyist movements and to the IVth International to be proud of and make use of such methods which they erroneously consider as communist ones.

There are no ready-made recipes to speed up the restart of the class struggle. No manoeuvres or expedients exist which will make the proletariat recognise the voice of the class. Such manoeuvres and expedients would not let the Party appear such as it really is but would represent a misrepresentation of its function to the detriment of the real starting up of the revolutionary movement which is based on the maturing of facts and a corresponding adjustment of the Party capable of doing this only because of its doctrinal and political inflexibility.

Insisting on Marxist determinism, the Italian Left has always denied that the party could keep up its influence on the masses by means of expedients, and has always denounced this false theory as a deviation of principles. Along the lines of past experiences, the Party therefore withholds from making and accepting invitations, open letters or agitation slogans aiming to form committees, fronts or agreements with other political organisations whatever their nature.

**11.** The Party does not hide the fact that when things start moving again this will not only be felt by its own autonomous development, but by the starting up again of mass organisations. Although it could never be free of all enemy influence and has often acted as the vehicle of deep deviations; although it is not specifically a revolutionary instrument, the union cannot remain indifferent to the party who never gives up willingly to work there, which distinguishes it clearly from all other political groups who claim to be of the "opposition". The Party acknowledges that today, its work in the unions can be done but sporadically; it does not renounce however to enter into the economic organisations, and even to gain leadership as soon as the numerical relationship between its members and sympathisers on the one hand, the union members or a given branch on the other is suitable, so long as the union in question does not exclude all possibility of autonomous class action.

**12.** The international current to which we belong cannot be characterised by its abstaining from voting, although the "abstentionist fraction" of the Italian socialist party played a preponderant part in the foundation of the Italian section of the IIIrd International, whose struggle and opposition to the Communist International on much more fundamental issues we vindicate.

The capitalist State taking on a constantly more evident form of class dictatorship which Marxism has denounced since the beginning, parliamentarism loses necessarily all importance. The elected organs and the parliament of the old bourgeois tradition are no more than survivals. They have no content any longer, only the democratic phraseology subsists and this cannot hide the fact that at the moment of social crises, the State dictatorship is the ultimate resource or

capitalism, and that the proletarian revolutionary violence must be directed against this State. In these conditions the Party discards all interest in elections of all kinds and develops no activity in this direction.

**13.** The cult of the individual is a very dangerous aspect of opportunism; it is natural that leaders who have grown old, may go over to the enemy and become conformists, and there have been but few exceptions to the rule. Experience has shown that revolutionary generations succeed each other rapidly. That is why the Party accords maximum attention to the young people and makes the greatest possible effort to recruit young militants and to prepare them for political activity, without any personal ambition or personality cult. In the present historical moment, deeply counter-revolutionary, the forming of young leaders capable of upholding the continuity and revolutionary tradition over a long period is necessary. Without the help of a new revolutionary generation the starting up of the movement is impossible.

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# Fundamental Theses of the Party

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At the Lyons Congress of the Communist Party of Italy in 1926, shortly before the Communist International adopted the theory of “socialism in one country”, the Left presented a draft theses (The Lyons Theses) which predictably was rejected by the largely Stalinised party. In these theses our current drew not only the balance sheet of the situation in Italy, of its activity when it was in the leadership of the Communist Party of Italy, and of the activity of the Gramsci-Togliatti leadership which was imposed on the party by the Communist International in the years after 1924. It also drew the balance sheet of the international movement, of the advance and subsequently of the retreat of the revolutionary wave of the post World War 1 period, of the activity of the Communist International both in its splendid restoration of the principles and program of the revolution and in its weaknesses and errors in the domain of tactics and organisation.

The Lyons Congress marked the close of a period. From the out-break of World War I in 1914 to 1926 the Italian Left gave its contribution to the reconstruction of the world party, and it waged a struggle, increasingly defensive, to make this party into a truly effective organ which could realise the aims it had given itself. After 1926 our current was struck by the blows of the counter-revolution in full force, manifested both in the Stalinist persecution as well as in bourgeois repression, whether fascist in Italy or democratic in France. At the same time it found itself increasingly isolated from the currents which on the international level took a position more or less opposed to Stalinism and its liquidation of the revolutionary party. These opposition currents in effect had a different conception both of the causes of the victory of the bourgeoisie and of Stalinism, -and of the way to struggle against them. It became more and more difficult to resist the devastation of the counter-revolution which was brought to bear on the working class movement. While Trotsky desperately looked for the outbreak of the revolution in the last battles of the proletarian retreat and sought at all price — even in the end at the price of compromising principles — to maintain a mass organisation, our current (and notably the Fraction in Exile) endeavoured to preserve the continuity of our tradition and to sow the seeds where they did not exist.

With the support given by the official “communist” parties to the imperialist war and with their participation in bourgeois governments of national reconstruction after the war, it became clear that these parties had definitively and irretrievably sunk into social-chauvinism, the defence and respect of bourgeois democracy, and the most barefaced class collaboration. It was only after these events and after a series of attempts to bring to birth a

party on its true Marxist foundations that our party was able to be definitively reconstructed. Although it was physically reconstructed essentially in Italy, it was not reconstructed as an Italian party but as the nucleus of a future international party and on the basis of an internationalist list program.

We must add a few words about the attempt at formation of the party in the period between the close of World War II and 1951 because the Fundamental Theses respond to and clarify certain problems existing during this period in order to lay the basis for the solid formation of the party in 1951-1952. During these years there was a formidable and praiseworthy attempt, based on a real combativity of many militants, to form a real party in Italy. This attempt however was surrounded by a great deal of confusion. The greater part of the comrades thought that the post World War II period would be a repetition of the previous post-war period and would result in a great revolutionary wave. This illusion not only led to a frenzied activism and a search for tactical and organisational expedients which in reality would destroy all the conquests of the left, but it also led to errors of principle and attempts to “update” and revise the Marxist theory. Given this extremely confused situation, it was necessary to struggle a number of years to clarify the divergences which were at work in a party not yet homogenous and which were masked behind differences apparently linked to the analysis of the period. This required first of all the re-appropriation of the Marxist doctrine in all its basic aspects and, on this basis, a complete appraisal of the revolution and counter-revolution in Russia and of the whole history of the Communist International. This work, which was reflected in the Fundamental Theses and in other basic works, had the result of producing a split at the end of 1951 between two orientations, then sufficiently delimited for their existence within the same organisation to have become impossible. To unite, as Lenin said, it is necessary to divide. Marxists of the Italian Left have never feared splits and have never held the illusion of those who believe they can achieve immediate success thanks to alliances and mergers with heterogeneous forces.

The real existence of the party, consequently, should be dated from the Fundamental Theses, which form the full text of a report to the general conference in Florence, December 8th and 9th, 1951. The Theses marked the close of one period and beginning of the veritable construction of our organisation. This meant that, after almost three decades of oblivion, the revolutionary movement was in a position to advance with a solid theoretical and organisational orientation and to develop all its work for the future revolution, which it knew to be many years away, on the basis of its own positions. This was possible because, for the first time since the tragedy of 1926 in the Russian party and the Communist International, the so-called “Italian” Left (which, however, distinguished itself by raising problems of principle and of tactics of international, not “national”, significance) was able to draw the lessons of the most awful counter-revolution the proletarian movement had ever suffered; it was possible because it was able to restore the continuity of the communist tradition that connects Marx and Engels to Lenin, to the Third International and to the battles waged by our current within the International and outside, against the frontist, populist, national and finally chauvinist deviations.

Precisely because it was conceived as a criterion for membership in the party — then still in its birth pangs and restricted to a very small corner of the world, isolated even within Europe — the text does not pretend to exhaust all the basic questions of Marxist theory and historical analysis. It develops only those questions regarded as essential in order to give the

party an indispensable homogeneity and stability and in order to demarcate it from the other allegedly close currents, reserving the solution of other questions, which it nonetheless anticipates, to subsequent party texts. The present reader should refer to these works in order to obtain a complete picture of our theoretical and programmatic positions on such topics as the national and colonial question, the problem of the relationship between revolutionary struggle, i.e. the direct struggle for the seizure of power, and the immediate struggle for partial objectives (hence also between the revolutionary organisation and mass organisations), the tactical and organisational bases of the party, the appraisal of the economic and social structure of Russia and China, and so on.

**Part I** is the party program, the same program that was adopted at the foundation of the Communist Party of Italy in 1921. It was only within the guidelines of the invariant basis of this program that it was possible to add several points concerning our analysis of fascism, and more generally of the increasingly fascist nature of modern capitalist society, and concerning the relations between the world proletarian party and the state which is born as a result of the revolutionary victory, renouncing all the treachery and deceit of such an idea as “socialism in one country”.

**Part II** deals with the universal and permanent tasks of the communist party. While insisting on the central role of the party both in the preparation for the revolution and in the exercise of the dictatorship, it emphasises the necessity of wide-based organisations intermediary between the party and the class, grouping together proletarians struggling on the level of economic (trade union type) demands. It insists on the necessity of the party as an organ of the class, and it rejects, as communists have always done, all conceptions of the party as something exterior to and “above” the proletariat as well as the idea of the party-dissolved-in-the-masses. It advances as permanent the triple task of the party: study, propagandise, and organise.

**Part III** places our action in the context of the history of the working class movement and the revolutionary movements. It deals primarily with the question of tactics in the general sense (with the more specific aspects of this question being taken up by later works). With the different waves of opportunist degeneration it shows how an inadequate or erroneous conception and application of tactics by the revolutionary party contributed to, reinforced and facilitated the play of objective forces which have tended to denature the party. It develops the tactical problems which the Communist International and the Russian party faced in the years 1921-1926, and it gives an account of the struggle that our current waged against the weaknesses and errors of the tactics pursued by the Comintern, drawing a balance sheet of these experiences. It analyses the defeat of the proletarian movement in the third opportunist wave, the role of the “Stalinist” parties, their positions and their counter-revolutionary action.

**Part IV** deals with the activity of the party and its priority tasks in a ferociously counter-revolutionary situation. It condemns as illusory and deadly any idea that a quick victory was possible in such a situation. It shows that the primary activity of the party in such circumstances must be the re-establishment of the communist theory, of Marxism, and its fierce defence against any “innovations”.

While the Theses place “theoretical” work in first place they also insist — and this is important to emphasise — on the necessity of pursuing all aspects of party work. They

affirm that the nature of the party's tasks does not change with the wind, according to the changing situations, but responds to its historical function. The conditions of the moment affect only the quantitative proportion of energy devoted by the party to the different sectors of activity and the immediate possibilities of action. Even when the party finds itself at the "deepest point of the depression" as it did in 1951, and even when it sees that "a resurgence of the revolutionary movement is conceivable only after a period of many years", it does not renounce any of its activities. Even when the situation does not allow it to have an influence on the masses, it does not deny its task of indicating the political line to follow. Even when capitalist society, its material forces and its political agents construct a terrible barrier preventing the party from having an influence on the masses, the party does not lose any opportunity of penetrating into even the smallest fracture opened up in bourgeois society in order to widen it and implant its subversive doctrine. Even when its trade union activity is of necessity extremely limited, the party never renounces this sector of activity.

The party always attempts to develop all sectors of its activity, because it knows that while there are no artificial expedients for accelerating the resurgence of the class struggle, this resurgence does not depend only on objective factors but also on its own activity. Our rejection of "tactical expedients" cannot be interpreted as a passivity characteristic of those who would renounce their responsibility for accomplishing the tasks which are their own.

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## I Theory

The party's doctrine is based on the principles of historical materialism and critical communism expounded by Marx and Engels in the Manifesto of the Communist Party, in Capital, and in their other fundamental works. These same principles formed the basis for the constitution of the Communist International, founded at Livorno in 1921. They were contained in the party program published in Battaglia Comunista no. 1, 1951, and republished several times since then in *Il Programma Comunista*.

The program reads as follows:

"The International Communist Party is founded on the basis of the following principles established at the formation of the Communist Party of Italy (section of the Communist International) at Livorno in 1921.

An ever-growing contradiction between the productive forces and relations of production develops within the present capitalist social system, engendering the antagonism of interests and the class struggle between the proletariat and the ruling bourgeoisie.

The present relations of production are protected by bourgeois state power. No matter what form of representative system, no matter what use may or may not be made of electoral democracy, the bourgeois state always constitutes the organ for defending the interests of the capitalist class.

The proletariat can neither destroy nor change the system of capitalist relations of production from which its exploitation derives without overthrowing bourgeois power by means of violence.

The indispensable organ of proletarian revolutionary struggle is the class party. The Communist Party, uniting in its ranks the most advanced and most resolute part of the proletariat, unifies the efforts of the labouring masses, leading them from the daily struggle for group interests and limited improvements towards the general struggle for the revolutionary emancipation of the proletariat. The party's tasks are to propagate revolutionary theory among the masses, to organise the material means for action, and to lead the working class through the development of its struggle by preserving the historical continuity and international unity of the movement.

After the overthrow of capitalist power, the proletariat can organise itself as the ruling class only by destroying the old state apparatus and instituting its own dictatorship. In other words it must deprive the bourgeois class, and the individual bourgeois as long as they survive socially, of all political rights and functions, and base the organs of the new regime on the producing class alone. The Communist Party, whose programme is characterised by the fact that it strives to realise these basic aims, represents, organises, and leads the proletarian dictatorship, sharing this role with no other party. The necessary defence of the proletarian state against all counter-revolutionary attempts can only be ensured by depriving the bourgeoisie and the parties which are enemies of the proletarian dictatorship of all means of agitation and political propaganda, and by equipping the proletariat with an armed organisation for repelling all internal and external attacks.

It is only the proletarian state which will be able to systematically intervene in the relations of the social economy, carrying out the whole series of measures which will assure the replacement of the capitalist system by the collective management of production and distribution.

As a result of this transformation of the economy and the concomitant transformation of all activities of social life, the need for a political state will be eliminated progressively, and the state apparatus will give way gradually to a rational administration of human activity.

The party's position as regards the situation in the capitalist world and within the workers' movement after World War II is based on the following points:

In the first half of the 20th century, the development of the capitalist social system has seen, in the economic sphere, the creation of employers' organisations for the purpose of securing a monopolistic position on the labour market, attempts to control and manage production and exchange according to central plans, and even state management of entire sectors of production. In the political sphere, there has been a strengthening of the police and military power of the state, while government has assumed totalitarian forms. These developments are not new types

of social organisation transitional between capitalism and socialism, much less a return to pre-bourgeois political regimes. On the contrary, they are definite forms of more direct and more exclusive management of power and the state by the most developed forces of capital.

This process precludes pacifist, evolutionist and “progressive” interpretations of the development of the bourgeois regime and confirms the Marxist prognosis concerning the concentration and antagonistic alignment of class forces. In order for the proletariat to strengthen and concentrate its revolutionary energies with a corresponding potential, it must reject the demand of an illusory return to democratic liberalism as well as the demand of legal guarantees, excluding both as agitational methods. The revolutionary class party must liquidate historically the practice of alliances for transitory goals, both with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties and with pseudo-workers’ reformist parties.

The imperialist world wars show that the crisis of capitalist disintegration is inevitable. Capitalism has embarked definitively on the phase in which its expansion no longer intensifies the historical growth of productive forces but instead makes the accumulation of productive forces dependent upon periodic and growing destruction. The world wars caused deep, repeated crisis within the world organisation of workers, since the ruling classes succeeded in exacting national and military collaboration of the working class in both camps. The only historical alternative which can be posed in this situation is the resumption of the class struggle in every country, and its generalisation into a civil war by the working masses to overthrow the power of all bourgeois states and world coalitions, a civil war led by the international communist party reconstructed as an autonomous force opposed to all political and military powers.

Since the proletarian state apparatus is an instrument and a weapon of struggle in an historical transitional period, it does not derive its organisational strength from constitutional rules or from any representative schema. The highest historical expression of such an organisation until now has been the workers’ soviets born in the course of the Russian Revolution in October, 1917, when the working class organised itself militarily under the exclusive leadership of the Bolshevik Party. The burning issues of that period were the totalitarian conquest of power, dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, and the struggle to repulse external attacks by the bourgeois governments and to crush the internal rebellion of the defeated classes, of middle and petty-bourgeois layers, and of the opportunist parties, which are unfailing allies of the counter-revolution in decisive phases.

The proletarian regime must defend itself against the dangers of degeneration contained in possible miscarriages and set-backs in the process of economic and social transformation, the full realisation of which is not conceivable within the confines of a single country. This defence can only be insured by a constant coordination between the policy of the workers’ state and the unified international struggle of the proletariat of each country against its own bourgeoisie, the capitalist state and its military apparatus. This struggle which must be waged incessantly in

whatever situation, be it peace or war, requires the political and programmatic control by the world communist party over the state apparatus in the country where the working class has conquered power”.

## II Tasks of the Communist Party

The working class can liberate itself from capitalist exploitation only through a political struggle, led by a political organ of the revolutionary class, the communist party.

The most important aspect of the political struggle in the Marxist conception is the civil war and the armed insurrection through which one class overthrows the power of the enemy ruling class and institutes its own power. This struggle cannot be successful unless it is led by the party organisation.

Just as the struggle against the power of the exploiting class cannot be accomplished without the revolutionary political party, like-wise the party is necessary for the subsequent work of eradicating the previous economic institutions. The dictatorship of the proletariat, which is indispensable throughout this by no means brief historical transitional period, will be exercised overtly by the party.

Before, during, and after the armed struggle for power, the party must also fulfil the following necessary tasks: the defence and propagation of revolutionary theory; the defence and reinforcement of the internal organisation through proselytism and propaganda for the communist theory and program; constant activity within the ranks of the proletariat wherever it is driven by economic needs and pressure to struggle in defence of its interests.

The party can include in its ranks neither all the individuals which constitute the proletarian class nor even the majority of the class. It includes only that minority which has attained a collective preparation and maturity, in theory and action, corresponding to the general vision and ultimate goal of the historical movement, in the entire world and throughout the historical course from the emergence of the proletariat to its revolutionary victory.

The party is not formed on the basis of individual consciousness. It not only is impossible for each and every proletarian to be conscious of the class doctrine, much less master it intellectually; but such a thing is not even possible for each party militant taken separately. Such a guarantee cannot even be given by the leaders, but only exists in the organic unity of the party.

Therefore, just as we reject every theory of individual action or of mass action independent of a precise organisational tissue, we also refuse any conception of the party as an assemblage of erudite, enlightened, or conscious individuals. Instead, the party is a tissue, a system, which has the organic function within the proletarian class of fulfilling the revolutionary tasks in all their



aspects and through all their complex phases.

Marxism has always emphatically rejected the syndicalist theory wherever it appeared. This theory offers the class exclusively economic organs in the form of trade, industrial, or factory organisations, to which it attributes the ability to develop the social struggle and accomplish the social transformation.

While Marxism considers the trade union in itself to be an insufficient organ for the revolution, it regards it as an indispensable organ for the mobilisation of the class on the political and revolutionary level, which is effected through the presence and penetration of the communist party in the working class economic organisations. In the difficult phases presented by the formation of economic associations, only those associations containing solely proletarians and which proletarians join voluntarily, without being obliged to profess specific political, religious or social beliefs, can be considered as favourable for the party's work. Such an open character does not exist in denominational organisations where membership is obligatory, nor in those that have become an integral part of the state apparatus.

The party never adopts the method of creating selective economic organisations composed only of workers who accept the principles and leadership of the communist party. But the party recognises unconditionally that neither the pre- insurrectionary situation nor the entire phase, when the party's influence over the masses grows decisively, can take shape unless a layers of organisations for immediate economic defence involving a large proportion of the proletariat extends between the party and the class and unless a network emanating from the party (nuclei, groups, and communist trade union factions) exists within these organisations. The task of the party during unfavourable periods when the proletariat is reduced to passivity is to foresee the forms and encourage the emergence of organisations for carrying out the immediate struggle for economic defence. In the future such organisations may assume entirely new aspects, possibly different from the already well-known type of trade unions, industrial unions, factory councils and so on. The party always encourages forms of organisations that facilitate contact and common action between workers from different localities and different occupations, while it rejects closed forms.

In the succession of historical situations the party remains aloof from the idealist and utopian vision that entrusts the improvement of society to a union of chosen or enlightened individuals, apostles, or heroes; from the libertarian vision that entrusts the same task to individual rebellion or to a revolt of masses without organisation; from the syndicalist or economist vision that entrusts it to the action of economic, apolitical organisations, whether or not it is accompanied by advocacy of violence; and finally from the voluntarist and sectarian vision that, disregarding the real determinist process through which the class insurrection arises from actions and reactions which far precede theoretical consciousness and even a clear will, advocates a small "elite" party which either surrounds itself with extremist trade unions — none other than its own



look-likes or commits the error of isolating itself from the proletariat's network of economic and trade union organisations. The latter error was typical of the German KAPD and Dutch Tribunists<sup>(1)</sup>, and was always fought against by the Italian Left within the Third International. The Italian Left took a specific position on the strategic and tactical questions of the proletarian struggle, which can only be treated in connection with that period and the sequence of historical phases in the proletarian movement.

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(1) The members of the *Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (KADP) in Germany, and the Dutch group inspired by Gorter and Pannekoek and assembled around the review *De Tribune*. They separated from the International definitively in 1921.

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### III Historical Waves of Opportunist Degeneration

It is impossible to advocate a position of intransigence (that is of refusal on principle of all alliances, united fronts, or compromises) valid for all the historical phases of the proletarian movement, without lapsing into an idealism that seeks justification in mystical, ethical, and aesthetic considerations foreign to the Marxist vision. Questions of strategy, manoeuvre, tactics and practice of the class and of the party are posed and resolved only in the context of history. Consequently they must be understood in relation to the larger global process of the proletariat's advance in the period between the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions, and not according to a minute study case by case preoccupied with particulars of place and time and entrusted to the whim of leadership groups and committees.

The proletariat itself is above all a product of the capitalist economy and industrialisation. Therefore, since communism cannot originate in the inspirations of individuals, academic circles, or sects, but only in the struggle of the proletarians themselves, one of the preconditions for communism is the irrevocable victory of capitalism over the forms that preceded it historically, in other words, the victory of the bourgeoisie over the feudal landed aristocracy and over the other classes of the ancien régime in Europe, Asia, and all countries.

At the time of the Communist Manifesto modern industry had only begun to develop and was limited to a very few countries. In order to hasten the explosion of the modern class struggle, the proletariat was called upon to fight alongside bourgeois revolutionaries in anti-feudal insurrections and in the wars of national liberation which in that period could only assume the form of armed struggles. Thus the participation of the workers in the great French revolution and in its defence against the European coalitions (including its Napoleonic phase) belongs to the great historical course of proletarian struggle, in spite of the fact that even then the bourgeois

dictatorship suppressed the first communist social manifestations fiercely.

Due to the defeats suffered by the still allied proletarians and bourgeois in the revolutionary movements of 1848, Marxists consider this period of anti-feudal strategy to extend to 1871 in Europe since historical feudal regimes still existed in Russia, Austria, and Germany, and since the conquest of national unity in Italy, Germany, and also Eastern Europe remained a precondition for European industrial development.

The year 1871 is an obvious historical turning point. The struggle against Napoleon III and his dictatorship is already clearly a struggle against a capitalist form, not a feudal one, and hence a product and evidence of the antagonistic concentration of modern class forces. Although it perceived a military obstacle to the modern bourgeois historical development of Germany in Napoleon III, revolutionary Marxism immediately championed the exclusively proletarian struggle against the French bourgeoisie that was waged by all parties of the Paris Commune — the first workers' dictatorship.

With this phase the possibility of a choice between two opposed historical groups and between two national armies is closed for Europe, since a “restoration” of pre-bourgeois forms had become socially impossible in two historical areas: England and North America on the one hand, and Europe as far as the border with the Czarist and Ottoman empires on the other.

### **a) First Opportunist Wave: Close of the 19th Century**

Disregarding the Bakuninist movement in the First International (1867-1871) and the Sorelian movement in the Second International (1907-1914), which we consider foreign to Marxism, the first wave of opportunism in the ranks of the Marxist proletarian movement was social-democratic revisionism. With the bourgeoisie's victory assured everywhere, a phase without insurrections and without wars was opened. The revisionist position, pointing to the extension of industry, the increase in the number of workers, and universal suffrage, held that socialism was possible through a gradual and bloodless evolution. Thus Bernstein attempted to empty Marxism of its revolutionary content by asserting that it did not belong to the working class, being instead a distorted reflection of the bourgeois insurrectionary period. In this phase, the tactical question of alliances between progressive or left bourgeois parties and proletarian parties acquired a new dimension. It was no longer a matter of assisting the birth of capitalism, but of passing from capitalism to socialism through laws and reforms; it was no longer a matter of fighting together in the city and countryside, but of voting together in parliamentary assemblies. Such a proposal of alliances and blocs and even the acceptance of cabinet posts by the proletariat's leaders assumed the historical character of a defection from the revolutionary path, and therefore radical Marxists condemned all electoral blocs.

## **b) Second Opportunist Wave: 1914**

The terrible second wave of opportunism struck the proletarian movement at the outbreak of the war in 1914. Countless parliamentary and trade union leaders, large groups of militants, and even entire parties portrayed the war between states as a struggle that might lead to a restoration of feudal absolutism and to the destruction of the bourgeoisie's civilised conquests as well as its modern productive network. Accordingly they preached solidarity with one's own national state in war-time. This was so on both sides of the front, since on the side of the advanced bourgeoisies of England and France there was Czarist Russia.

The majority of the Second International plunged into opportunist complicity in the war. Few parties, among them the Italian Socialist Party, escaped this fate, and only advanced groups and factions aligned with Lenin, who defined the war as a product of capitalism and not a conflict between capitalism and more ancient social forms. Lenin concluded not only that the Union Sacrée and the national alliance had to be condemned, but that the proletarian parties in each country must call for revolutionary defeatism against all warring states and armies.

The Third International was formed on the historical anti-social-democratic and anti-social-patriotic basis.

The entire proletarian International not only refused the practice of alliances with other parties for the exercise of parliamentary power; more than that, it denied that the proletarian party alone could conquer power by legal means, however "intransigent" this party may be, and on the ruins of the peaceful phase of capitalism it reaffirmed the necessity of armed violence and the dictatorship.

Not only did the Third International repudiate all alliances with warring governments, even in "defensive" wars, and maintain a class opposition, even in wartime; beyond this, it strove to carry out defeatist action behind the battle lines in every country in order to transform the imperialist war between bourgeois states into a civil war between classes.

The revolutionary reply to the first wave of opportunism was the formula: no electoral, parliamentary, or ministerial alliances to obtain reforms.

The reply to the second wave was the tactical formula: no war alliance, after 1871, with one's own state and bourgeoisie.

The belated effect of these reactions prevented the proletariat everywhere from taking advantage of the turning point and collapse of 1914-1918 to engage and win the fight for revolutionary defeatism and for the destruction of the bourgeois state.

The sole imposing historical exception was the victory of October 1917 in Russia. Russia was

the only large European state still ruled by a feudal regime, and was only sparingly penetrated by capitalist forms of production. In Russia there was a numerically small party which had a tradition of firmly adhering to the correct positions of Marxist doctrine. It had opposed the two opportunist waves within the International, and after the splendid dress rehearsal of the 1905 uprising it had proven its ability to grapple with the problems of a fusion of two revolutions: bourgeois and proletarian.

This party fought alongside of the other parties against Czarism in February 1917, then immediately afterwards against both the liberal bourgeois parties and the opportunist proletarian parties, and succeeded in defeating all of them. Moreover, it played a central role in the reconstruction of the revolutionary International.

The significance of this tremendous event is crystallised in irrevocable historical results. In the easternmost country bordering the western European area a relentless struggle led the proletariat alone to power, even though its social development was not entirely complete. After sweeping away the western-style liberal-democratic forms that had just been instituted, the proletarian dictatorship undertook the enormous task of pressing forward economic evolution, a task which entailed overcoming both feudal and new-born capitalist forms. The accomplishment of this task required a victorious resistance against attacks by counter-revolutionary armies and capitalist forces. This necessitated the mobilisation of the whole world proletariat to the side of the Soviet power for the attack on the western bourgeois powers. And, with the spread of the revolutionary struggle to the continents inhabited by non-white peoples, it required the mobilisation of all the forces ready to take up armed revolt against the Imperialism of the white imperialist centres.

In the European area the strategy of anti-feudal blocs with the left-bourgeois movements is entirely closed and is replaced by the strategy of armed proletarian struggle for power. But in the backward countries, on the terrain of armed struggle, the emerging proletarian communist parties could not scorn participating in insurrections by other anti-feudal social elements either against the local despotic rulers or against the white colonial masters.

In Lenin's time the historical alternative was as follows: either the world struggle of the proletariat would result in a victory with the overthrow of capitalist power at least in a large part of advanced Europe and the consequent transformation of the Russian economy at rapid tempo, leaping over the capitalist stage to catch up with western industry which was already ripe for socialism; or else the large centres of bourgeois imperialism would survive, with the consequence that the revolutionary power in Russia would have to retreat and confine itself to the tasks of only one of two social revolutions, the bourgeois revolution, applying an immense effort to the construction of a capitalist — not a socialist -economy.

Thus hastening the conquest of power in Europe was necessary to prevent the soviet state

within a few short years from being violently overthrown or from degenerating into a capitalist state. As soon as it became apparent that bourgeois society was reconsolidating itself after the grave shock of the first World War, and that the communist parties would not succeed in winning their battles, except in a few very quickly suppressed attempts, the obviousness of this necessity prompted a search for means to destroy the influence still exerted on significant layers of proletarians by social democracy and opportunism.

Two counterpoised methods were advanced: the first considered the parties of the Second International, which were conducting an open and ruthless campaign against the communist program as well as against revolutionary Russia, as avowed enemies, and fought them as a part — the most dangerous — of the bourgeois class front. The second consisted in resorting to expedients, to strategic and tactical “manoeuvres”, in order that the masses influenced by the social-democratic parties could be won over to the communist party.

The second method was erroneously justified by invoking the experiences of Bolshevik policy in Russia, thereby deviating from the correct historical position. The Bolshevik’s proposals of alliances with other parties — petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois parties — were conditioned by the fact that Czarist power had declared all these movements illegal and compelled them to adopt insurrectionary struggle. In Europe it was not possible to propose common action, even for purposes of a manoeuvre, on the level of parliamentary or trade union legalism. In Russia, the experience of liberal parliamentarianism and legal trade unionism had been very brief in 1905 and lasted only a few months in 1917, whereas in the rest of Europe a half-century of degeneration had turned these domains into fertile ground for extinguishing all revolutionary energies and for imprisoning proletarian leaders in the service of the bourgeoisie. The guarantee provided by the Bolshevik party’s firmness in the area of organisation and with respect to principles was quite different from any guarantee offered by the existence of proletarian state power in Russia, since — as history has demonstrated — due to the very fact of the existing social relations and international relationship of forces, this power was more vulnerable to the danger of renouncing revolutionary principles and directives.

Consequently the left-wing of the International, to which the enormous majority of the Communist Party of Italy belonged until it was practically destroyed by reaction (promoted above all by the historical errors in strategy), demanded that in the West all alliances and proposals of alliances with socialist and petty-bourgeois political parties (the tactic of political united fronts) be rejected. It agreed that communists must attempt to enlarge their influence on the masses by participating in all economic and local struggles and by calling upon workers from all organisations and persuasions to develop these struggles to the maximum. But it denied absolutely that the activity of the party should ever be subordinated to the action of political committees, fronts, blocs, or alliances between several parties, even if only for the purpose of public declarations not affecting the internal intentions and directives of the party apparatus. With even greater vigour it rejected the alleged “Bolshevik” tactic when it assumed the form of

the “workers’ government” slogan, an agitational formula (which on a few occasions led to disastrous practical experiences) for taking power by parliamentary means through a heterogeneous majority comprising communists and socialists of all shades. If the Bolshevik party had been able to envision participating without danger in provisional and multi-party governments during the revolutionary phase, and if this enabled it to pass immediately to the most abrupt autonomy of action and even the outlawing of its temporary allies, then this was possible solely because the configuration of historical forces was entirely different: the period of double revolution created an immense pressure, and the existing state was bound to crush any attempt to take power by parliamentary means. It was absurd to transpose such a strategy to a situation where the bourgeois state had a half-century of democratic tradition behind it, with parties that had submitted to constitutional legality.

In the balance, the tactical method pursued by the International from 1921 to 1926 proved negative, and in spite of this, at each Congress (Third, Fourth, and Fifth, and the Enlarged Executive of 1926), more opportunistic variants were adopted. This method was based on the following rule: change tactics according to the assessment of the situation. Every six months new stages in the development of capitalism were revealed by spurious analyses, and each stage had to be combated with new manoeuvres. This is what is at the root of revisionism, which has always been “voluntaristic”. When it recognised that the predictions about the advent of socialism had not yet been fulfilled, it thought it could force history with a new practice, but in fact it only ceased to struggle for the proletarian and socialist objective of our maximum program. The reformists of 1900 reasoned that since the situation precluded the possibility of insurrection from then on, it was senseless to await the impossible; why not work for concrete possibilities, elections, legal reforms, and union gains. When this method failed, trade union voluntarism reacted by placing the blame on political practice and on the political party as such, and advocated action by audacious minorities in a general strike led by the unions alone in order to change the situation.

Similarly, when the International saw that the Western proletariat did not take up the struggle for its own dictatorship, it resorted to expedients in order to break the impasse. The result of this was that once the momentary imbalance in capitalist forces had passed, the objective situation and the relationship of forces were not appreciably changed, while the movement became weakened and more and more corrupted. Thus it happened that the impatient revisionists to the right and left of revolutionary Marxism ended up in the service of the bourgeoisie in the Union Sacrée of the war. Theoretical preparation and the restoration of principles were sabotaged by the confusion created between the conquest of total power by the proletariat and the formation of “friendly” governments through the support and parliamentary or ministerial participation of communists. In Saxony and Thuringia the experiment ended in a farce, and only two policemen were needed to remove the government’s communist leader from his post.

No less confusion was caused in the realm of internal organisation, and the difficult task of

splitting the revolutionary elements from the opportunists in different parties and countries was compromised. It was thought that new elements, easily manipulable by the centre, could be obtained by tearing off the left-wings en bloc from the socialist parties. The new International instead, after an initial period of formation, should have had a stable operation as the world party of the proletariat, to whose national sections new proselytes had to adhere individually. The conquest of large groups of workers was sought, but in reality there was only conniving with the leaders, and this disorganised the leading cadres of the communist parties, continuously changing and re-changing the composition of their leaderships during periods of active struggle. Factions and cells within the socialist and opportunist parties were acknowledged as communist, and organisational fusions were practised. Thus, rather than becoming fit for struggle, almost all parties were maintained in a state of permanent crisis, and functioned without continuity or a well-defined delimitation between friend and foe; consequently continuous failures occurred in the various nations. The Left instead demands organisational uniformity and continuity.

Another point of disagreement was the replacement of a territorial organisation of communist parties by one based on the workplace. This restricted the horizon of the rank-and-file organisations, which consequently comprised only elements from the same trade with parallel immediate economic interests. The natural synthesis of the various social “thrust” in the party with its single final objective was weakened. It was expressed only in slogans and directives transmitted by the representatives of the higher centres, who moreover had become party officials and began to exhibit all the characteristics that had been criticised in the political and trade union functionarism of the Second International. This critique cannot be confused with a demand for “internal democracy” or with the regret that party leaders cannot be chosen through “free elections”. Instead, at issue were a profound divergence of conceptions concerning the organic character of the party as an historical body living in the reality of the class struggle, and a profound deviation in principle, which rendered communist parties unable to foresee and confront the opportunist danger.

Analogous deviations arose within Russia, where, for the first time in history, the movement faced the difficult problem of organisation and discipline within a communist party that had attained total state power and naturally had undergone an enormous growth in its membership. The difficulties of the relationship between the domestic social struggle for a new economy and the external political revolutionary struggle created differences of opinion between the Bolshevik Old Guard and new members. The party’s leading body which now had not only the party apparatus, but also the entire state apparatus in its hand, was not content with basing itself on the party’s doctrine, its tradition of struggle, and the unity and organic character of the international revolutionary movement in order to promote its own opinions or those of the majorities which formed within the leadership, but began to suppress the opposition and protests of militants by means of measures executed by the state apparatus. It proclaimed that in the interest of the revolution any disobedience toward the party centre not only had to be suppressed

by internal organisational measures, including even expulsion from the party, but it should also be considered as an attack against the revolutionary state. Such a false relationship between the two organs, the party and the state, obviously created the possibility that the group controlling both of them might enforce the abandonment of the principles and historical line that had characterised the party during the pre-revolutionary period and that belonged to the whole revolutionary proletarian movement.

The party must be considered an organism, united in its theory and action; and membership in it imposes binding obligations on the leaders and militants. But joining (or leaving) the party must not be accompanied by any physical coercion, and this rule must be observed before, during, and after the seizure of power. The party alone, and with complete autonomy, leads the struggle of the exploited class to overthrow the capitalist state, just as it leads the state of the revolutionary proletariat alone and with complete autonomy. But precisely in its capacity as an historically transitory revolutionary organ, the state cannot intervene with legal or police measures against members or groups in the party without this signifying a serious crisis. From the moment when this practice was adopted in Russia the party experienced an influx of opportunist elements with no other objective than to procure advantages or to induce the state to favour their interests, and these dubious members were accepted without hesitation. Thus, instead of the state beginning to wither away, the party dangerously swelled in size. Because of the mechanical reversal of this relationship, foreign elements succeeded in eliminating the orthodox Marxists from the leadership of the party and the Soviet state, and the betrayers of revolutionary principles were able to paralyse, then try and sentence the consistent defenders of those principles, including those who perceived the irreparable deviation too late. In fact, the government, feeling the repercussions of all the relations it maintained with domestic enemy forces as well as with foreign bourgeois governments (including antagonism and open struggle), resolved the problems and dictated solutions to the leadership and organisational centre of the Russian party. The latter, in turn, easily dominated the parties of the other countries in the international organisations and congresses and manipulated the directives of the Comintern which became increasingly conciliatory and eclectic.

The Italian Left, without contesting the revolutionary historical merits of the Russian party, which had led the first proletarian revolution to victory, always maintained that the contributions of other parties still engaged in open struggle with the bourgeois regime remained indispensable. Hence in order to resolve the questions of revolutionary action in Russia and the rest of the world, the following hierarchy was necessary: the International of world communist parties; its different sections, among them the Russian section; and finally, for Russian policy, the Communist government executing the party's directives. Any other arrangement could only compromise the internationalist character of the movement and its revolutionary efficiency. Lenin himself had acknowledged on many occasions that if the revolution were to extend to Europe and the world, the Russian party would assume not even second place, but the fourth



place at best in the general political and social leadership of the communist revolution. Only on this condition was it possible to avoid the possibility of a divergence between the interests of the Russian state and the objectives of the world revolution.

It is not possible to date precisely the beginning of the third opportunist wave, the third pathological degeneration of the world proletarian party, following the two previous ones which had paralysed Marx's International and led to the shameful decline of the second Socialist International. After the political, tactical, and organisational deviations and errors dealt with in points 11 to 16 above, the International succumbed to a full-fledged opportunism with Moscow's attitude toward totalitarian forms of bourgeois government and the repression of the revolutionary movement. These forms appeared after the great proletarian assaults that followed the first World War in Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bavaria, the Balkan states, etc.. In a formula of questionable Marxist accuracy the International defined these forms, from the economic point of view, as a capitalist offensive aimed at lowering the standard of living of the working class, and, from the political point of view, as an attempt to suppress the freedom of liberal democracy. Whereas traditionally Marxism had considered liberal democracy to be the most propitious atmosphere for the corruption of the revolutionary movement, the International presented it as a milieu favourable for a proletarian offensive. These new forms were actually the fullest and most complete realisation of the great historical course foreseen only by Marxism: on the one hand, economic concentration testifying to the social and global character of capitalist production and compelling the capitalist system to consolidate its apparatus; on the other hand, the consequences in the area of politics and social war resulting from the inevitable final confrontation between classes envisioned by Marxism, corresponding to a situation in which the pressure exerted by the proletariat still remained below the defensive potential of the capitalist class state.

The leaders of the International committed a gross historical error by confusing these events of the postwar period with the Kerensky period in Russia. This led not only to a grave error of theoretical interpretation, but also to an unavoidable reversal in tactics. A defensive and conservative strategy was established for the proletariat and for the communist parties, recommending the formation of fronts with all the least combative and shrewdest bourgeois groups (and consequently the least sound allies) which maintained that it was necessary to secure immediate advantages for the workers without depriving the popular classes of rights of association, voting rights, etc.. The International did not understand that fascism or national socialism had nothing to do with a revival of feudal and despotic forms of government, nor did it signify a predominance of supposedly right bourgeois strata opposed to the more progressive big industrial capitalist class, much less an attempt by classes intermediate between the employers and the proletariat to set up an autonomous government. Moreover, it did not understand that fascism, discarding the repugnant mask of parliamentarism, inherited pseudo Marxist social reformism in toto, and assured the workers and the most deprived masses not just

a vital minimum, but a series of advances in the realm of social assistance, through a number of measures and interventions by the class state in the interest of preserving capitalism. Thus the International issued the slogan of the struggle for freedom, which was imposed on the Italian party by the chairman of the International from 1926. Yet almost all the party's militants wanted to combat fascism, then in its fourth year in power, with autonomous class politics, and not by making blocs with all the democratic, or even monarchist and catholic parties, for the purpose of demanding the return of constitutional and parliamentary guarantees. From this period the Italian communists had striven to denounce the content of the anti-fascism practised by all the middle bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, and pseudo-proletarian parties; and in vain they warned that all revolutionary energies would end up in ruins once the International had embarked on the path of degeneration which finally led to the Committees of National Liberation during the Second World War.

The policy of the communist party is by its very nature offensive, and in no case must it fight for an illusory preservation of conditions characteristic of capitalist institutions. If the proletariat had to fight alongside bourgeois forces in the period before 1871, it was not to enable the bourgeoisie to preserve its established positions or prevent the fall of historically attained forms, but instead to enable it to destroy and surpass historically antecedent forms. In the field of daily economics as in general world politics, the proletariat has nothing to lose and therefore nothing to defend, and its only task is to attack and conquer. Therefore in the appearance of concentrated, unified, and totalitarian forms of capitalism, the party above all must recognise its total ideological victory. It consequently must concern itself exclusively with the real relationship of forces for the preparation of the revolutionary civil war, since this relationship has been rendered unfavourable precisely by successive waves of opportunist and gradualist degeneration. It must do everything in its power to unleash the final attack, and when it cannot do this, it must face defeat; but it must never in a cowardly and defeatist manner beseech the devil of fascism to go away, which would amount to begging stupidly for tolerance or forgiveness from the class enemy.

### **c) Third Opportunist Wave: Since 1926.**

In the second of the great historical opportunist waves the betrayal took humanitarian, philanthropic, and pacifist forms, and culminated in a repudiation of the insurrectional method and armed action, later turning into an apology for legalised state violence in the war. What is new in the third degenerative wave is that betrayal and deviation from the revolutionary class line are also presented in the form of combat and civil war. In the present phase, the critique of deviation from the class line remains the same, whether the latter takes the form of common fronts, blocs, or alliances formed for purely propagandist or electoral and parliamentary purposes, or whether it consists in a hybrid collusion with movements alien to the communist

party with the object of bringing one government to power over another within a country by means of a military struggle entailing the conquest of territory or strongholds. Hence, the policy of alliances during the Civil War in Spain (during a period of international peace) as well as the entire partisan movement and the so-called “Resistance” against the Germans or the fascists (during World War II), despite the violent methods employed, represent an unequivocal betrayal of the class struggle and a form of collaboration with capitalist forces. The communist party’s refusal to subordinate itself to committees composed of heterogeneous parties or situated above parties can only become more resolute when legal agitation gives way to the vital and primordial domain of conspiracy, military preparation and military organisation, where it is criminal to have anything in common with non-proletarian movements. It is useless to recall that in cases of defeat, the collusions always ended with a barrage of reprisals against the communists, and in cases of apparent success, with the complete disarming of the revolutionary wing and the denaturation of its party, giving rise to a new consolidation of bourgeois law and order.

All these manifestations of opportunism, both in the tactics imposed on the European parties as well as in the governmental practice in Russia, were crowned after the outbreak of the Second World War by the Russian state’s policy vis à vis the other belligerent states and by the directives given by Moscow to the communist parties. Not only did these parties not refuse to support the war in all capitalist countries, nor take advantage of the war in order to initiate class actions of revolutionary defeatism with the objective of smashing the state; on the contrary, in the first phase Russia concluded an agreement with Germany, and consequently, while it was decided that the German section should not take action against the Hitler regime, Russia dared to dictate a so-called Marxist tactic to the French and English bourgeoisies, and Moscow recommended that the parties conduct illegal actions against the state and army. But as soon as the Russian state found itself in military conflict with Germany, it consequently acquired an interest in the effectiveness of all the forces opposed to Germany. Not only were the parties in France, England, etc., given the opposite political directive and the command to go over to the Front for national defence (exactly as the Socialists denounced by Lenin had done in 1914), but all theoretical and historical positions were reversed, and the war conducted by the Western powers against Germany was declared — not imperialist — but a war for freedom and democracy, and this from the very beginning, since 1939, when the war broke out and all the pseudo-communist press and propaganda had been directed against England and France.

Thus it is clear that the forces of the Communist International (which formally was liquidated as a certain point in order to provide the imperialist powers with a better guarantee that the communist parties in those countries were completely at the service of their respective nations and fatherlands) had not been employed at any time during the long war to bring about the fall of a capitalist power or the conditions for a conquest of power by the working class. Instead, they were employed only in open collaboration with an imperialist camp; and moreover a

collaboration with one or another camp according to the changing military and national interests of Russia. The fact that it was no longer a case of simple opportunist tactics, even driven to its extreme, but a total abandonment of the historical positions of communism was proved by the audacity with which the political appreciation of the bourgeois powers was reversed. France, England, and the United States, defined as imperialist and plutocratic in 1939-40, became representatives of progress, freedom, and civilisation in the subsequent years, and shared the program for world reorganisation with Russia. But such a spectacular transformation, which was alleged to be in conformity with the theory and texts of Marx and Lenin, did not even have a definitive character, since the first dissensions after 1946 and the first local conflicts in Europe and Asia were enough for Russia and its followers to condemn these same states, in the stronger language, as the most heinous imperialism.

The ordeals faced by the revolutionary parties that assembled in Moscow in 1919-20 spiralled as they went from contacts with the just denounced social-traitors and social-patriots, to united fronts, to experiments with coalition workers' governments that renounced the dictatorship, to blocs with petty bourgeois and democratic parties, and finally to a total enslavement in the war policies of capitalist powers, today [1951] not only openly acknowledged to be imperialist, but even no less "fascist" than Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Consequently it is no wonder that in the last thirty years any vestige of revolutionary class character in these parties has been completely destroyed.

The third historical wave of opportunism has combined the worst characteristics of the two preceding waves, just as capitalism incorporates all the phases of its development in its modern structure.

At the end of the second imperialist war the opportunist parties were allied with all the avowed bourgeois parties in the Committees of National Liberation and participated alongside them in the formation of constitutional governments. In Italy they even participated directly in monarchist cabinets, deferring the questions of the institutional state form to a more "opportune" moment. Consequently they repudiated the use of revolutionary means for the conquest of political power by the proletariat, sanctioning the necessity of legal and parliamentary struggle, to which all the class impulses of the proletariat had to be subordinated in the interest of a conquest of political power by a peaceful and electoral road. They advocated participation in governments of national defence, preventing any opposition to governments committed to the war, just as they had refrained from sabotaging the fascist governments during the first years of the conflict, and supported the war efforts through the production of indispensable goods.

Opportunism pursued its disastrous course, and even sacrificed the Third International formally to the class enemy of the proletariat, imperialism, in order to promote "a further strengthening of the United Front of the Allies and other united nations". Thus the historical

prediction of the Italian Left, formulated during the first years of the existence of the Third International, had come true. It was inevitable that the growth of opportunism and its domination over the workers' movement should lead to the liquidation of all its revolutionary orientations.

Therefore the reconstruction of the class force of the world proletariat has been severely belated and difficult, and will require a greater effort than ever before.

The counter-revolutionary influence on the world proletariat, which was broadened and deepened by the direct participation of opportunist parties on the side of the victorious states in the second world conflict, has resulted in a military occupation of the defeated states in order to prevent an uprising of the exploited masses. This occupation was accepted and justified in its counter-revolutionary intent by all the so-called socialist and communist parties during the conferences at Yalta and Teheran. Thus any serious possibility of revolutionary attack against the bourgeois powers was obstructed, both in the victorious allied countries and in the defeated countries. This demonstrated the correctness of the position of the Italian Left, which considered World War II to be imperialist and the military occupation of the defeated countries to be counter-revolutionary, and predicted the absolute impossibility of an immediate revolutionary resurgence.

In perfect consistency with all its increasingly counter-revolutionary past, Russia and its affiliated parties modernised the theory of permanent class collaboration, postulating the peaceful, global co-existence between capitalist and socialist states. A peaceful competition between states was substituted for the struggle between states, burying once more the doctrine of revolutionary Marxism. A socialist state, if it does not declare holy war against imperialist states, declares and maintains the class struggle within the bourgeois countries, and prepares the proletariat in theory and practice for insurrection. This is the only position that conforms to the program of the communist parties, which do not hesitate to proclaim openly their opinions and aims (The Communist Manifesto, 1848), and advocate and postulate precisely the violent destruction of bourgeois power.

Therefore the states and the parties that admit the hypothesis of peaceful "coexistence" and "competition" between states instead of propagating the absolute incompatibility between enemy classes and the armed struggle for the liberation of the proletariat from the yoke of capitalism, are in reality neither revolutionary states nor revolutionary parties, and their phraseology only mask the capitalist content of their structure.

The persistence of this ideology within the ranks of the proletariat represents a tragic obstacle. Until it is surmounted there will be no resurgence of the class struggle.

The political opportunism of the third wave appears more abject and shameful than its predecessors, since it has descended to the most repugnant depths of pacifism.

The manoeuvre that consists in alternating between pacifism and partisan resistance conceals the triple scandalous about-face in the appreciation of Anglo-American capitalist imperialism, defined as imperialist in 1939, democratic and a “liberator” of the European proletariat in 1942, and once again as imperialist today.

In reality, even at the time of World War I, American capitalism showed that it was a powerfully reactionary and imperialist power (albeit in a lesser degree than today). Lenin and the Third International drew attention to this several times during the glorious period of revolutionary struggle.

By exploiting the attraction pacifism possesses for the workers, opportunism exercises an undeniable profound influence on them, although it is obviously inseparable from social pacifism.

Defence of peace and country constitutes propaganda themes common to all states and parties coexisting within the United Nations, the new edition of the League of Nations, that “den of thieves” as Lenin called it. These themes are based on class collaboration and represent the fundamental principles of opportunism.

The present-day opportunists show that they are completely outside the revolutionary process, and that they are not even at the level of the utopians, Saint-Simon, Owen, Fourier, nor even at the level of Proudhon himself.

Revolutionary Marxism rejects pacifism as a theory and a propaganda method, and subordinates peace to the violent overthrow of world imperialism. There will be no peace until the whole world proletariat has been liberated from bourgeois exploitation. Moreover, Marxism denounces pacifism as a weapon of the class enemy used to disarm the proletariat and deliver it from the influence of the Revolution.

It has become a habitual practice for opportunism to offer a helping hand to the parties of imperialism, to form national governments of “national unity” between classes. Stalinist opportunism has realised this aspiration in the highest bourgeois international organisation, the United Nations, declaring an increasingly broader, unlimited inter-class collaboration on the condition that war between the two rival imperialist blocs be avoided and that the repressive apparatus of the states be camouflaged by a veil of democracy and reformism.

Where Stalinism rules uncontested it has realised this conditions by setting up a national power in which all social classes are represented. In this way it pretends to harmonise opposed interests, as in the bloc of four classes in China, where the proletariat, far from having conquered political power, is constantly subjected to the pressure of youthful industrial capitalism, and pays the price of “National Reconstruction” on the same basis as the proletariat of all the other countries of the world.

The disarming of revolutionary forces offered to the bourgeoisie by the social patriots of 1914 and by the ministerialists such as Millerand, Bissolati, Vandervelde, Mac Donald, etc., scourged and battered by Lenin and the International, pales before the scandalous and cynical collaboration of the present social-patriots and ministerialists. The Italian Left opposed the slogan of “workers’ and peasants’ government”, showing that either it was a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and was thus an equivocation and a pleonasm, or it meant something else, and was thus unacceptable. It rejected all the more the overt theory of class collaboration, even if it was presented as a transitory tactical means. It claimed the unconditional monopoly of the state and its organ by the proletariat and the class party and called for its unitary and indivisible class dictatorship.

## **IV Party Action in Italy and other Countries in 1952**

Since its inception the history of capitalism has presented an irregular development marked by the periodic cycle of crises, established by Marx to be more or less ten years apart and preceded by periods of intense continuous development.

Crises are inseparable from capitalism which, in spite of these, does not cease to grow, expand, and swell, until the matured forces of the revolution deal it a final blow. Parallel to this the history of the proletarian movement during the course of the capitalist period presents phases of high pressure and advance, phases of sudden or gradual retreat caused by defeat or degeneration, and phases of long wait before a resurgence. The Paris Commune was violently defeated and a period of relatively peaceful development followed, during which precisely the revisionist and opportunist theories emerged, proving the retreat of the revolution.

The October Revolution was defeated through a gradual involution, culminating in the violent annihilation of its surviving architects. Since 1917 the revolution has been the missing element and even today (1951) a resurgence of the revolutionary forces does not appear to be imminent.

In spite of its cyclical crises the capitalist mode of production has extended and taken hold in all countries almost without relent in its technical and social aspects. On the other hand, the tormented history of antagonistic class forces is linked to the vicissitudes of the general historical struggle, to the potential contradiction already present at the dawn of bourgeois rule over the feudal and pre-capitalist classes, and to the political evolution of the two historical class enemies, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, a development marked by victories and defeats, by error in tactics and strategy. The first clashes date from 1789, proceeding through 1848, 1871, 1905 and 1917 to today. All the while the bourgeoisie has sharpened its weapons of struggle against the proletariat, corresponding to the increasing growth of its economy.

By contrast, in the face of the gigantic extension and growth of capitalism, the proletariat has not always been able to employ its class energies successfully, and after every defeat has fallen back into the net of opportunism and betrayal, remaining far from the revolution for an increasingly long period of time.

The cycle of victorious struggles, of even more disastrous defeats, and of opportunist waves in which the revolutionary movement has succumbed to the influence of the enemy class, represents a broad field of positive experiences through which the revolution matures.

After the defeats, the revolutionary resurgences have been long and difficult. But although it does not appear on the surface of political events, the thread of the movement has not been broken; it maintains the revolutionary class tradition crystallised in a small vanguard.

Periods of political depression:

- from 1848 to 1867, from the second Parisian revolution to the eve of the Franco-Prussian war, the revolutionary movement was embodied almost exclusively in Marx and Engels and a small circle of comrades.
- from 1872 to 1889, from the defeat of the Paris Commune to the beginning of the colonial war and the re-opening of the capitalist crisis which would lead to the Russo-Japanese war and then to World War I, a period of reflux of the movement during which the consciousness of the revolution is represented by Marx and Engels.
- from 1914 to 1918, the period of World War I during which the Second International collapsed and Lenin and other comrades from a few countries carried the movement forward.

With 1926 another unfavourable period for the revolution began during which the October victory was liquidated. Only the Italian Left maintained the theory of revolutionary Marxism intact and in it alone are crystallised the premises of the class resurgence. During World War II the conditions of the movement worsened further, since the war placed the whole proletariat at the service of imperialism and Stalinist opportunism.

Today we are in the midst of the depression, and a resurgence of the revolutionary movement is conceivable only after a period of many years. The length of the period corresponds to the gravity of the wave of degeneration, as well as to the increasingly large concentration of enemy capitalist forces. On the one hand Stalinism has assumed the most destructive characteristics of the two preceding waves of opportunism, and on the other the process of capitalist concentration today is far greater than that immediately following World War I.

Today, although we are at the deepest point of the political depression and the possibilities for



action are considerably reduced, the party, following revolutionary tradition, does not intend to break the historical line of preparation for a future large-scale resurgence of the class movement, which must integrate all the results of the previous experiences. The restricted nature of practical activity does not mean a renunciation of revolutionary postulates. The party recognises that the restriction of certain sectors of activity is quantitatively accentuated, but the entirety of the aspects of its activities is not changed on account of this, and the party does not renounce any area deliberately.

Today the principal activity is the restoration of the theory of Marxist communism. We are still at the stage of “the weapon of critique”. The party will present no new doctrine but reaffirms the full validity of the fundamental theses of revolutionary Marxism, which have been confirmed amply by facts and more than once falsified and betrayed by opportunism in order to cover retreats and defeats.

The Italian Left denounces and combats the Stalinists today, as it has always denounced all revisionists and opportunists.

The party bases its activity on anti-revisionist positions. Lenin combated the revisionism of Bernstein as soon as it appeared on the political scene, and restored the principled line by demolishing the arguments of the two social-democratic and social-patriotic revisions.

The Italian Left denounced the first tactical deviations as soon as they emerged within the Third International, as the first symptoms of a third revision, which has manifested itself fully today and which contains the errors of the first two.

The proletariat is the last exploited class and consequently in its turn will exploit no one. This is precisely why the doctrine was born with the birth of the proletarian class itself and can be neither modified nor revised.

The development of capitalism from its inception to today confirms the theorems of Marxism as they are set down in the classical texts, and all the purported “innovations” or “teachings” of the last thirty years only confirm that capitalism still lives and must be destroyed. Therefore the central point of the present doctrinal position of the movement is this: no revision of the original principles of the proletarian revolution.

The Party today undertakes a work of scientific observation of social phenomena, with the aim of confirming the fundamental theses of Marxism. It analyses, confronts, and comments on recent and contemporary events. It repudiates any doctrinal elaboration that tends to found new theories or to demonstrate the inadequacy of the Marxist doctrine for the explanation of phenomena.

All this work of demolishing opportunism and “deviationism” (Lenin: What Is To Be Done?)

is today the basis of party activity. The party follows revolutionary tradition and experiences in this work during these periods of revolutionary reflux and the proliferation of opportunist theories which had as their violent and inflexible opponents Marx, Engels, Lenin and the Italian Left.

With this correct revolutionary evaluation of the present-day tasks in hand, the party, although small and having only limited links with the mass of the proletariat, although tenaciously attached to the theoretical task as the most immediate task, absolutely refuses to consider itself as a circle of thinkers or simple researchers who are looking for new truths or who have supposedly lost yesterday's truth and consider it inadequate.

No movement can triumph in history without a theoretical continuity, which is the experience of previous struggles. Consequently the party prohibits personal freedom to elaborate and conjure up new schemata and explanations of the contemporary social world. It prohibits the individual freedom of analysis, critique, and perspective even for its members who are the best prepared intellectually, and defends the firmness of a theory which is not the product of blind faith, but the content of the proletarian class science, constructed from the experiences of several centuries, not from the thought of individuals, but from the force of material facts, reflected in the historical consciousness of a revolutionary class and crystallised in its party. Material facts have only confirmed the doctrine of revolutionary Marxism.

The party, despite the limited number of its members resulting from clearly counter-revolutionary conditions, does not suspend proselytism and the propagation of its principles in all oral and written forms, even if its meetings are attended by only a few individuals and its press has a limited circulation. The party considers its press as the principal activity in the present phase, since it is one of the most effective means permitted by the real situation for indicating the correct political line for the masses to follow, and for an organic and more extensive propagation of the principles of the revolutionary movement.

Events, and not the will or determination of individuals, thus also determine the extent to which the penetration of the broad masses is possible, limiting it today to a small part of the party's general activity. Nonetheless the party does not pass up the opportunity to insert itself into every fracture, every break, knowing well that there can be no resurgence until this sector of its activity has been expanded amply and has become dominant.

The acceleration of the process depends not only on the profound social causes of historical crises, but also on the work of proselytism and propaganda with the reduced means at the party's disposal. The party denies absolutely that the process can be stimulated by expedient recipes and manoeuvres directed at groups, leaders and apparatchiks that usurp the name "proletarian", "socialist", or "communist". These methods, which characterised the tactics of the Third International after Lenin's absence from the political scene, had no other effect than the

disorientation of the Comintern as the organisational expression of the theory and the operative force of the movement, while every “tactical expedient” caused the parties to lose sections of their membership. These methods have been advocated and approved by the Trotskyist movement and by the Fourth International, which wrongly consider them to be communist methods.

There are no fixed recipes for accelerating the class resurgence. There are no “manoeuvres” or “expedients” that can make the proletariat listen to its class voice. Such methods cannot make the party appear for what it truly is, but instead deform its function, undermining and compromising the effective resurgence of the revolutionary movement, since the latter is based on the real maturation of the situation and on the ability of the party to respond adequately, an ability that it can acquire only through doctrinal and political inflexibility. The Italian Left has always combated the method of resorting to tactical expedients to stay afloat, denouncing it as a deviation from principles and incompatible with Marxist determinism.

The party, in line with its previous experiences, thus abstains from issuing or accepting invitations, open letters, and agitational slogans as a basis for forming committees, fronts, and agreements with other political movements and organisations, whatever they may be.

The party does not conceal the fact that in phases of resurgence it cannot strengthen itself in an autonomous way unless a form of trade union associationism of the masses emerges.

Although the trade union has not always been free from the influence of the enemy classes and has functioned as a vehicle of extended and profound deviations and deformations, and although it is not a specific revolutionary instrument, nonetheless it is an object of the party’s attention, and the party does not refuse voluntarily to work within it, distinguishing itself clearly from all the other political groups. While the party recognises that it can conduct trade union activity only in a sporadic manner today, it never renounces this activity. From the moment when the concrete numerical relationship between its members, sympathisers, and unionised workers in a given branch reaches a certain proportion, and on the condition that the organisation in question does not exclude in its statutes and a priori the possibility of conducting an autonomous class activity, the party will undertake to penetrate it and attempt to conquer its leadership.

The party is not a direct descendent of the Abstentionist (Left-Wing) Faction of the Italian Socialist Party, although this tendency played a large role in the movement that culminated in the formation of the Communist Party of Italy at Livorno in 1921. The opposition of the Left within the Communist Party of Italy and the Communist International was not based on the theses of abstentionism, but on other basic questions. Parliamentarianism loses its importance little by little with the development of the capitalist state, which will assume the form of an open class dictatorship as Marxism has recognised since its inception. Even where they seem to

survive, the parliamentary electoral institutions of the traditional bourgeoisies are emptied of their content more and more. What remains is only an empty phraseology which in moments of social crisis reveals the open dictatorial form of the state as the final expression of capitalism, against which the revolutionary proletariat must direct its violence. Therefore since this historical level and this present relationship of forces has been reached, the party can have no interest in democratic elections of any kind and does not develop its activity into this domain.

It is a fact of revolutionary experience that revolutionary generations succeed each other rapidly and that the cult of the individual is a dangerous aspect of opportunism, since the defection of old leaders to the enemy and to conformism due to exhaustion is a natural fact confirmed by rare exceptions. This is why the party directs the maximum attention to the youth and devotes the maximum effort to the recruitment of young militants and to their preparation for political activity, excluding any. careerism or personality cult.

In the present historical atmosphere of counter-revolutionary high potential, we are compelled to create young leadership elements which will guarantee the continuity of the revolution. The contribution of a new revolutionary generation is a necessary condition for the resurgence of the movement.

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[Bordiga Archive](http://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1951/fundamental-theses.htm)

Amadeo Bordiga 1951

# Murder of the Dead

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In Italy, we have long experience of “catastrophes that strike the country” and we also have a certain specialisation in “staging” them. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, rainstorms, epidemics... The effects are indisputably felt especially by poorer people and those living at high densities, and if cataclysms that are frequently much more terrifying strike all corners of the world, not always do such unfavourable social conditions coincide with geographical and geological ones. But every people and every country holds its own delights: typhoons, drought, tidal waves, famine, heatwaves and frosts, all unknown to us in the “garden of Europe”; and when one opens the newspaper, one inevitably finds more than one item, from the Philippines to the Andes, from the Polar Ice Cap to the African Desert.

Our capitalism, as has been said a hundred times over, is quantitatively small fry, but today it is in the vanguard, in a “qualitative” sense, of bourgeois civilisation, of which it offers the greatest precursors from amidst Renaissance splendour<sup>[1]</sup>, in the masterful development of an economy based on disasters.

We wouldn’t dream of shedding a single tear if a monsoon washed away entire cities on the coast of the Indian Ocean, or if they were submerged by the tidal waves caused by submarine earthquakes, but we have found out how to collect alms from all over the world for the Polesine.

Our monarchy was great in knowing to rush not to the dance (Pordenone), but to where people are dying of cholera (Naples), or to the ruins of Reggio and Messina, raised to the ground by the earthquakes of 1908. Now our puffed-up President<sup>[2]</sup> has been taken off to Sardinia and, if the stalinists haven’t been fibbing, they have shown him teams of “Potemkin workers” in action, that then run to the other side of the stage like the warriors in Aida.<sup>[3]</sup> It was too late to pull the homeless out of the flooding Po, but good play was made of MPs and ministers paddling about in their wellies after setting up cameras and microphones for a world-wide broadcast of their lamentations.

Here we have the bright idea: the state should intervene! And we have been applying it for a good ninety years. The professedly homeless Italian has set state aid in the place of the grace of

God and the hand of providence. He is convinced that the national budget has much wider bounds than the compassion of our Lord. A good Italian happily forks out ten thousand lire squeezed out of him so that months and months later he can “squander one thousand lire of the government’s money”. And during one of these periodic contingencies, now fashionably called emergencies but which fall in all seasons, when the central government has scarcely initiated the unfailing provisions and fundings, a band of no less specialised “homeless” will roll up its sleeves and plunge into the business of procuring concessions and the orgy of contracts.

The Minister of Finance of the day, Vanoni, suspends by his authority all other state functions and declares that he will not provide a single brass farthing from the exchequer for all the other “Special Acts” so that all means can be addressed to dealing with the present disaster.

There could be no better proof than this that the state serves for nothing and that if the hand of God really did exist, he would make a splendid present to the homeless of all kinds by causing earthquakes and bankrupting this charlatan and dilettante state.

The foolishness of the small and middle bourgeoisie shines forth at its brightest when it seeks a remedy for the terror that freezes it in the warm hope of a subsidy and an indemnity liberally bestowed upon it by the government. But the reaction of the overseers of the working masses who, they scream, lost everything in the disaster, but unfortunately not their chains, appears no less senseless.

These leaders, who pretend to be “marxists”, have for these supreme situations, which interrupt the well-being of the proletariat derived from normal capitalist exploitation, an economic formula even more foolish than that of state intervention. The formula is well-known: “make the rich pay!”

Vanoni is thus reviled because he was unable to identify and tax high incomes.[\[4\]](#)

But a mere crumb of marxism suffices to establish that high incomes thrive where high levels of destruction occur, big business deals being based on them. “The bourgeoisie must pay for the war!” stated those false shepherds in 1919 instead of inviting the proletariat to overthrow it. The Italian bourgeoisie is still here, and enthusiastically invests its income in paying for wars and other disasters for which it is then repaid four fold.

## Yesterday

When the catastrophe destroys houses, fields and factories, throwing the active population out of work, it undoubtedly destroys wealth. But this cannot be remedied by a transfusion of wealth from elsewhere, as with the miserable operation of rummaging around for old jumble, where the advertising, collection and transport cost far more than the value of the worn out clothes.

The wealth that disappeared was that of past, ages-old labour. To eliminate the effect of the catastrophe, a huge mass of present- day, living labour is required. So, if we use the concrete social, not abstract, definition of wealth, we can see it as the right of certain individuals, who form the ruling class, to draw on living contemporary labour. New incomes and new privileged wealth are formed in the mobilisation of new labour, and the capitalist economy offers no means of “shifting” wealth accumulated elsewhere to plug the gap in Sardinian or Venetian wealth, just as one could not take from the banks of the Tiber to rebuild the ones swallowed up by the Po.

This is why it is a stupid idea to tax the ownership of the fields, houses and factories left intact to rebuild those affected.

The centre of capitalism is not the ownership of such investments, but a type of economy which allows the drawing from and profiting from what man’s labour creates in endless cycles, subordinating the employment of this labour to that withdrawal.

Thus the idea of resolving the war-time housing crisis with an income freeze on landlords of undamaged houses led to the provision of homes in a worse condition than that caused by the bombing. But the demagogues shout easy arguments so as not to confuse the working masses.

The basis of marxist economic analysis is the distinction between dead and living labour. We do not define capitalism as the ownership of heaps of past, crystallised labour, but as the right to extract from living and active labour. That is why the present economy cannot lead to a good solution, realising with the minimum expenditure of present labour the rational conservation of what past labour has transmitted to us, nor to better bases for the performance of future labour. What is of interest to the bourgeois economy is the frenzy of the contemporary work rhythm, and it favours the destruction of still useful masses of past labour, not giving a tupenny-ha’penny damn for its descendants.

Marx explains that the ancient economies, which were based more on use than exchange value, did not need to extort surplus labour as much as the present one, recalling the only exception: that of the extraction of gold and silver (it is not without reason that capitalism arose from money) where the worker was forced to work himself to death, as in Diodorus Siculus.

The appetite for surplus labour (Capital Vol. I, Ch. 10, Section 2: “The Greed for Surplus Labour”) not only leads to extortion from the living of so much labour power as to shorten their lives, but does good business in the destruction of dead labour so as to replace still useful products with other living labour. Like Maramaldo,<sup>[5]</sup> capitalism, oppressor of the living, is the murderer also of the dead: “But as soon as people, whose production still moves within the lower forms of slave-labour, corvée-labour, etc., are drawn into the whirlpool of an international market dominated by the capitalist mode of production, the sale of their products for export becoming their principal interest, the civilised horrors of over-work are grafted on the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom, etc.” <sup>[6]</sup>

The original title of the paragraph quoted is “Der Heisshunger nach Mehrarbeit”, literally; “The voracious appetite for surplus labour”.

Small scale capitalism’s hunger for surplus labour, as set out in our doctrine, already contains the entire analysis of the modern phase of capitalism that has grown enormously: the ravenous hunger for catastrophe and ruin.

Far from being our discovery (to hell with the “*discoverers*”,[\[7\]](#) especially when they sing even the scale out of tune, then believe themselves to be creators), the distinction between dead and living labour lies in the fundamental distinction between constant and variable capital. All objects produced by labour which are not for immediate consumption, but are employed in a further work process (now one calls them producer goods), form constant capital. “Therefore, whenever products enter as means of production into new labour processes, they lose their character of being products and function only as objective factors contributing to living labour.”[\[8\]](#)

This is true for main and subsidiary raw materials, machines and all other types of plant which progressively wear out. The loss due to wear which has to be compensated for requires the capitalist to invest another quota, always of constant capital, which current economics calls amortisation. Depreciate rapidly, that is the supreme ideal of this grave-digging economy.

We recalled *a propos* “the body possessed by the devil” [\[9\]](#) how, in Marx, capital has the demoniacal function of incorporating living labour into dead labour which has become a thing. What joy that the Po’s embankments are not immortal, and today one can happily “incorporate living labour into them”! Projects and specifications are ready in a few days. Good boys, you are possessed by the devil!

“Sir, the drawing office of our firm has done its duty in predisposing technical and economic studies: here they are all nice and ready.” And price analysis values the stone of Monselice higher than Carrara marble.[\[10\]](#)

“The property therefore which labour-power in action, living labour, possesses of preserving value, at the same time that it adds it, is a gift of Nature which costs the labourer nothing, but which is very advantageous to the capitalist inasmuch as it preserves the existing value of his capital.” [\[11\]](#)

This value, which is simply “preserved”, thanks always to the operation of living labour, is called the constant part of capital or constant capital by Marx. But: “... that part of capital, represented by [invested in] labour-power [wages], does, [instead] in the process of production, undergo an alteration of value. (...) and also produces an excess, a surplus-value...” [\[12\]](#)

We therefore call it the variable part, or simply variable capital.



The key lies here. Bourgeois economics calculates profit in relation to the constant capital which lies still and doesn't move: in fact it would go to the devil if the labour of the worker did not "preserve" it. Marxist economics, on the contrary, places profit in relation only to variable capital and demonstrates how the active labour of the proletarian a) preserves constant capital (dead labour), and b) increases variable capital (living labour). This increase, surplus value, is gained by the entrepreneur. This process, as Marx explains, of establishing the rate without taking into account constant capital is like making it equal to zero: an operation current in mathematical analysis where variable quantities are concerned.

Once constant capital is set at zero, gigantic development of profit occurs. This is the same as saying that the enterprise's profit remains if the disadvantage of maintaining constant capital is removed from the capitalist's shoulders.

This hypothesis is none other than state capitalism's present reality.

Transferring capital to the state means that constant capital equals zero. Nothing of the relationship between entrepreneurs and workers is changed, since this depends solely on the magnitude of variable capital and surplus-value.

Are analyses of state capitalism something new? Without any haughtiness we use what we have known since 1867 at the latest. It is very short:  $C_c = 0$ .

Let us not leave Marx without this ardent passage after the cold formula: "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks." [\[13\]](#)

Modern capital, which needs consumers as it needs to produce ever more, has a great interest in letting the products of dead labour fall into disuse as soon as possible so as to impose their renewal with living labour, the only type from which it "sucks" profit. That is why it is in seventh heaven when war breaks out and that is why it is so well trained for the practice of disasters. Car production in America is massive, but all, or nearly all, families have a car, so demand might be exhausted. So then it is better that the cars last only a short time. So that this is indeed the case, firstly they are badly built with a series of botched parts. If the users break their necks more often, no matter: a client is lost, but there is another car to substitute. Then they call on fashion with a large cretinising subsidy of advertising propaganda, through which everyone wants the latest model, like the women who are ashamed to put on a dress, even if perfectly good, "from last year". The fools are taken in and it does not matter that a Ford built in 1920 lasts longer than a brand new 1951 model. And finally the dumped cars are not used even for scrap, and are thrown into car cemeteries. Who dares to take one saying: you have thrown it away as if it were worthless, what harm is there in me fixing and reusing it? He would get a kick up the backside and a gaol sentence.

To exploit living labour, capital must destroy dead labour which is still useful. Loving to suck warm young blood, it kills corpses.

So while the maintenance of the Po embankments for ten kilometres requires human labour costing, let us say, one million a year, it suits capitalism better to rebuild them all spending one billion. Otherwise it would have to wait one thousand years. This perhaps means that the nasty fascist government sabotaged the Po embankments? Certainly not. It means that no one has pressed for an annual budget of a miserable million. This is not spent as it is swallowed up in the financing of other “large scale works” of “new construction” which have budget estimates of billions. Now the devil has swept away the embankments, one finds someone with the best motives of sacrosanct national interest who activates the project office and has them rebuilt.

Who is to blame for preferring the large scale projects? The fascists and the official communists. Both of them prattle that they want a productivist, full employment policy. Productivism, Mussolini’s favourite creature, consists in establishing “present day” cycles of living labour out of which big business and big speculation make billions. Let us modernise the aged machines of the great industrialists and also let us modernise the river banks after letting them collapse, all at the people’s expense. The history of the recent years of administrative management of state works and of the protection of industry is full of these masterpieces, ranging from the provision of raw materials sold below cost, to works “undertaken by a state monopoly” in the “struggle against unemployment” on the basis of “constant capital equals zero”. In a few words, let us spend it all in wages, and since the enterprise has only shovels for equipment, the Lord is convinced that it is useful to shift earth first from here to there then immediately back to here again.

If the Lord hesitates, the enterprise has the trade union organiser to hand: a demonstration of labourers shouldering shovels under the ministry’s windows and all’s well. The “*discoverer*” arrives and supersedes Marx: shovels, the only constant capital, have given birth to surplus value.

## Today

Undoubtedly, the size of the disaster along the Po has been massive, and the estimated cost of the damage is still rising. Let us admit that the cultivated area of Italy lost one hundred thousand hectares or one thousand square kilometres, about one three hundredth or three per thousand of the total. One hundred thousand inhabitants have had to leave the area, which is not the most densely settled in Italy, or, in round figures, one five hundredth or two per thousand.

If the bourgeois economy were not mad, one could do a simple little sum. The national stock has suffered a serious blow. However, the zone was only partially destroyed. When the

floodwaters recede, the agricultural soil will largely be left behind and the decomposition of vegetation along with the deposition of alluvium will partially compensate for the lost fertility. If the damage is one third of total capital, it costs one thousandth of the national capital. But this has an average income of five per cent or fifty per thousand. If for a year every Italian saved scarcely one fiftieth of his consumption, the damage would be made good.

But bourgeois society is anything but a co-operative, even if the great freebooters of native capital escape Vanoni by demonstrating that “part-ownership” of their enterprises has been distributed among the employees.

All the productivistic operations of Italian and international economy are more or less as destructive as the Paduan disaster: the water entered through one hole and left through another.

Such a problem is insuperable on capitalist grounds. If it were a question of making the arms to provide Eisenhower with his hundred divisions within a year, the solution would be found<sup>[14]</sup>. These are all short-cycle operations and capitalism is as pleased as Punch if the order for the 10,000 guns is with a delivery date in 100 and not 1,000 days. The steel pool does not exist without reasons.

But a pool of hydrological and seismological organisations cannot be formed, at least not until the great science of the bourgeois period is really able to provoke series of floods and earthquakes, like aerial bombardments.

Here it is a matter of a slow, non accelerable centuries long transmission from generation to generation of the results of “dead” labour, but under the guardianship of the living, of their lives and of their lesser sacrifice.

Let us admit, for example, that the water in the Polesine will recede in a few months and that the breach at Occhiobello is closed before the spring, only one annual harvest cycle would now be lost: no productive “investment” can replace it, but the loss is reduced.

If, instead, one believes that all the Po embankments and those of the other rivers will frequently come apart, due as much to the consequences of overlooked maintenance during thirty years of crisis as to the disastrous deforestation of the mountains, then the remedy will be even slower in coming. No capital will be invested for the good of our great-grandchildren.

Our father wrote in vain that only a few examples of virgin forest remain, growing without the intervention of human labour. The forestry system thus becomes almost man’s work despite the minimum of capital in the operation. Nevertheless, high growing trees, the most important in the public economy, always require a very long period before yielding a useful product. However, forestry science has shown that the best year to fell timber is not that at the end of the maximum life span, but that in which current growth equals average growth, one must always

calculate 80, 100 and even 150 years for an oak wood. Di Vittorio and Pastore<sup>[15]</sup> would fling the book, if they had ever opened it, out of the window.

As in the operetta: steal, steal capital (love) cannot wait...

There is still worse to relate. Relatively little is said of the disaster in Sardinia, Calabria and Sicily. Here the geographical facts differ drastically.

The very slack gradient of the Po valley caused a build-up of water which then swamped over the clay and impermeable soils below. The same reasons in the South and the Islands, of high rainfall and deforestation of the mountains, along with the steep fall down to the sea caused the destruction. The mountain streams washed sand and gravel from the bedrock and destroyed fields and houses, all in a few hours, without, however, causing many victims.

Not only is the sacking of the magnificent forests of Aspromonte and the Sila by the allied liberators irreparable, but here also the renewal of the land swamped by the flood waters is practically impossible, not merely uneconomic for the “investors” and for the “helpers” (more self-interested than the former, if that is possible).

Not only the narrow horizons of cultivable soil, but also the thin non-rocky strata that gave it weak support have been washed away, soil which was carried up many times over decades by the grindingly poor farmers. Every plantation, every tree, the basis of a rather profitable agriculture, and industry in some villages, came down with the soil and the orange and lemon trees floated out to sea.

Replanting a destroyed vineyard takes about two years, but citrus plantations only provide a full harvest after seven to ten years and a great amount of capital is needed to establish and run them. Naturally, the good books do not give the cost of the unthinkable operation of carrying up again, for hundreds of meters, the soil brought down and, in any case, the water would carry it away again before the plant roots could fix it to the subsoil.

Not even the houses can be rebuilt where they were before for technical, not economic reasons. Five or six unfortunate villages on the Ionian coast in the Province of Reggio Calabria will not be rebuilt on their own hill sites, but down by the sea.

In the Middle Ages, after devastation had caused the disappearance of every last trace of the magnificent coastal cities of Magna Graecia, the apex of agriculture and art in the ancient world, the poor agricultural population saved itself from Saracen pirate raids by living in villages built on the mountain tops, which were less accessible and thus more defensible.

Roads and railways were built along the coast with the arrival of the “Piedmontese” government and, where malaria did not prohibit it, where the mountains ran down close to the sea, every village had its “on-sea” near the station. It became so convenient to carry timber

away.

Tomorrow only the “on-seas” will remain and there they are laboriously rebuilding some houses. So what then if the peasant reclaims the slope where nothing can ever take root and the very bare and friable rock strata itself does not permit the rebuilding of houses? And the workers by the sea, what will they do? Today they can no longer emigrate like the Calabrians of the unhealthy lowlands and the Lucanians of the “damned claylands” made sterile by the greedy felling of the woodlands which once covered the mountains and the trees that spread over the upland grazing.

Certainly, in such conditions, no capital and no government will intervene, a total disgrace of the obscene hypocrisy with which national and international solidarity was praised.

It is not a moral or sentimental fact that underlies this, but the contradiction between the convulsive dynamic of contemporary super- capitalism and all the sound requirements for the organisation of the life of human groups on the Earth, allowing them to transmit good living conditions through time.

Bertrand Russell, the Nobel Prize winner, who quietly pontificates in the world press, accuses man of overly sacking natural resources, so much so that their exhaustion can already be calculated. Recognising the fact that the great powers conduct absurd and mad policies, he denounces the aberrations of the individualist economy and tells the Irish joke: why should I care about my descendants, what have they ever done for me?

Russell counts among the aberrations, along with that of mystical fatalism, that of communism which states: if we have done with capitalism, the problem is solved. After such a display of physical, biological and social science, he is unable to see that it is an equally physical fact that the huge level of loss of both natural and social resources is essentially linked to a given type of production, and thinks that all would be resolved by a moral sermon, or a Fabian appeal to the human wisdom of all classes.

The corollary is pitiful: science becomes impotent when it has to solve problems of the spirit?

Those who really achieve human progress, taking decisive steps forward in the organisation of human life, are not really the conquerors and dominators who still dare to ostentate greed for power, but the swarms of insipid benefactors and proponents of the ERP<sup>[16]</sup> and brotherhood among peoples, like so many pacifist doves.

Passing from cosmology to economics, Russell criticises the liberal illusions in the panacea of free competition and has to admit: “Marx predicted that free competition among capitalists would lead to monopoly, and was proved correct when Rockefeller established a virtually monopolistic system for oil.”

Starting from the solar explosion, which one day will instantaneously transform us into gas (which could prove the Irishman right), Russell finishes with maudlin sentiments: “Nations desiring prosperity must seek collaboration more than competition.”

Is it not the case, Mr. Nobel Prize winner, who has written treatises on logic and scientific method, that Marx calculated the development of monopoly fifty years earlier?

If that were good dialectics, the opposite of competition is monopoly, not collaboration.

Take good note that Marx also predicted the destruction of the capitalist economy, class monopoly, not with collaboration, with which you are devoted to flattering all the Trumans and Stalins of good will, but with class war.

Just as Rockefeller came, “big moustache[\[17\]](#) must come!” But not from the Kremlin. That one, despite Marx, is about to shave like an American.

## Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) “The first capitalist nation was Italy.” (Engels, “Preface to the Italian Edition of The Communist Manifesto”)

[\[2\]](#) Luigi Einaudi, President of Italy 1948-55.

[\[3\]](#) Potemkin had constructed prefabricated villages to show Catherine II on her tour of the Russian countryside. They gave the impression of rural prosperity, but after each visit they were hastily dismantled then re-assembled elsewhere on the tour.

[\[4\]](#) In early 1951 Vanoni introduced personal income tax to Italy. This tax entered the Guinness Book of Records as the ‘least paid tax in the world’. Still today tax evasion is widespread. (Cf. 11th. ed., 1963, p. 10)

[\[5\]](#) Maramaldo killed the dying General Ferrucci in 1530, the last act of Florentine independence. The British equivalent is Ivo of Ponthieu who hacked at the dying King Harold at Hastings. But he was “branded with ignominy by William and expelled from the army” (Gesta Regun Anglorum). The chivalry of nascent feudalism contrasts favourably with the squalid unscrupulousness of early capitalism.

[\[6\]](#) *Capital* Vol. I, Chap. 10

[\[7\]](#) Publisher’s Note — The word used in the Italian original is “troviero”. This literally means “finder” and, in the context, actually means something like “someone who thinks they’ve found something important, but they haven’t”, e.g. some bourgeois apologist who thinks they have refuted Marx. There is no obvious English equivalent so “discoverer”, with the inverted commas, will have to do.

[\[8\]](#) *Capital* Vol. I, Chap. 10

[9] In this collection.

[10] Monselice: the nearest stone quarries to the Po, Carrara: the main centre of marble production in Italy.

[11] *Capital* Vol. I, Chap. 8

[12] *ibid.*

[13] *Capital* Vol. I, Chap. 10, Section 1

[14] The article refers to the start of the Korean War.

[15] The “communist” and “catholic” union leaders of the period respectively.

[16] The European Recovery Programme, the “Marshall Plan”.

[17] i.e. Stalin, “Uncle Joe”.

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Amadeo Bordiga 1952

# Marxism of the Stammerers

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The decontamination to which we dedicate 90% of our humble work will be continued a long time after us and be realised only in the distant future. This decontamination combats the epidemic - always and everywhere dangerous, of those who - in all places and at all times - innovate, bring up to date, renovate and revise.

It would be useless and even detrimental to specify or to personalise - to search around for a bacteriological bomb thrower - rather, it is a matter of identifying the virus itself and of applying the antibiotic which we obstinately assert exists in the continuity of the line and fidelity to principles, with preference being given 999 times out of a thousand to catechistical ruminations rather than to the exploit of the new scientific discovery, which require of us the wings of eagles, but to which all too often vulgar gnats feel themselves drawn by destiny.

It therefore disturbs these quivering winged creatures, when, bluntly down to earth, we remind them of the modest altitude that it is given to us to attain, we to whom all heroism and all romanticism is forbidden; we, who stick to irony rather than lyricism, feel obliged to remind those who are too impetuous: Don't play at being Phaeton. It would be nice to test out on the abacus those who suffer from the hysteria of making purist calculations, to ascertain if they are capable of adding up on the ends of their fingers or not.

Woe betide to those who believe themselves to be expressing revolutionary theory and who pretend to be - as is said nowadays - a mouthpiece of the proletarian movement, who haven't yet digested and assimilated the crucial turning-point where our doctrine abandoned traditional positions.

Woe betide to all, but especially those groups who wish to place themselves at the extreme left of the movement, and to personify the struggle against degeneration. It has been far too easy for opportunists and those who collaborate with the class enemy, to defame the "left" by accusing it of being prey to illusions, sectarianism, extreme formalism and of not comprehending the overall dialectic of Marxism.



The retort and defence of the international left has consisted and consists, of demonstrating that the rejection of concessions, compromises and manoeuvres doesn't stem from a relapse into mysticism and metaphysics, like that of the extremely simple child who, like in the old religious beliefs, opens all doors with the key of one sole antithesis between two opposed principles: good and evil.

The "good" for us would equate with the proletariat, and the "evil" with capitalism: which everywhere at all times without need of further reference points, is this same capitalism, an absolute evil, - always one - always the same. The rest a fairy-tale! We have fought for a long time to demonstrate that we **don't** reason thus, and that we have understood well "the dialectic of living history" by unmasking the falsity of postleninist opportunism, and by tracing out with sufficient exactitude the path of its line over thirty years from orthodoxy to total renunciation.

We certainly weren't deterred when they reminded us that with the onset of each historical stage the terms of the antithesis change. For although for believers in all mystics, good can only beget good, and evil beget evil for fear that the eternal **values** etched in the light of the spirit should fall, according to our revolutionary doctrine, Communism is the son of capitalism and it could only have been engendered by it and that despite that, and even because of it, it must fight and overthrow it. Furthermore, the historical timing of turning points and of reversals of positions occur by virtue of material conditions and relations - never thanks to the clownishly vigilant will of petty men or grouplets, self-appointed through their negligible conviction of being instrumental in checking the path is not a mistaken one.

## Yesterday

The spread of the "Communist Manifesto" was slow in Italy. In the preface to the 1.2.1893 Italian edition, Frederick Engels was clearly aware of the "general opinion" according to which what was being dealt with were a country and a Proletariat that were "behind". A view so general and enduring, that not less than half a century later, the second Risorgimento, the second 1848, would still remain "to be made". Engels harked back at that time to 1848, to recall that this revolution contemporary to the "Manifesto" wasn't Socialist, but prepared the ground in Europe for the Socialist Revolution.

We have returned to this text to rediscover there two important truths, truths which are on the level of two and two equals four, but which it is evidently necessary to "resuscitate" - namely: "the manifesto gives full credit to the revolutionary part played by capitalism in the past. -The first capitalist nation was Italy".

Let us chew this over thoroughly. The end of the feudal middle ages and the beginning of the modern capitalist era is fixed by Engels - not with Walter Audisio, Mussolini's executioners - but with Dante.

We have often said that the "Manifesto" is an apology of the bourgeoisie, and we add that today, the Second World War and the reabsorption of the Russian Revolution, a second one should be written, not in terms of **philosophies of values**; for these values pour into the bourgeois ideology the implacable economicism and shopkeeper's spirit appropriate to the class and the time. We need to vindicate **the accused**, in order to conclude that it is time to condemn him to death.

To prove this we should draw evidence from the Manifesto as a whole. We will confine ourselves however to memorising ten words:

"the bourgeoisie has played an eminently revolutionary role in history".

We now take up from a later passage. The main reason why the pre-bourgeois production relations were, in a certain sense, static regarding the requirements of the ruling class, whilst bourgeois relations are brutally dynamic, lies in the breaking down of the narrow circles of satisfaction of needs of the autarkic islands of production/consumption. Here is the thesis, expressed so of ten, but ever new:

"In place of the old needs met by local (spell it! L-O-C-A-L) production, new ones appear which demand for their satisfaction, the products of distant countries and regions".

Karl Marx's "Capital" (whoever is horrified by the smell of decay and mumification is invited to seek after new, more exalted texts) contains a section, the fourth in the first chapter, which, in ten pages resumes the entire work and its subject, in fact all Marx's work, written and unwritten. The section is entitled: "the fetishism of commodities and the secret thereof", an illiterate manual labourer can easily understand it, but for the intellectual who attempts its mastery, fifty years of elementary school will scarcely be enough.

We would recommend for inclusion on the agenda at a party meeting, for anyone who would like to give it a - "truly political" foundation, the reading and application - whilst looking out of the window of course - of chapter 1, section 4.

Marx was face to face with a thesis already established by classical political economy. Thus he named the school which openly sought to explain the nature of naissant capitalist production without glossing anything over,

"in opposition to **vulgar** economy which contents itself with appearances (...) and restricts itself in truly pedantic fashion to erecting a system and proclaiming as eternal truths the most banal and stupid illusions, with which the agents of bourgeois production like to people their universe, the best of all possible worlds".

A vulgar school still alive and well to which we may enrol the great economists of the like of Sombart and Keynes. Therefore Marx accepted a thesis, a **discovery** of classical economy:

"the exchange value of a commodity is given by the labour time necessary for it's production".

Proletarian science accepts this thesis on the one hand whilst on the other it demonstrates that

as long as this truth **implicitly** includes the conviction that as long as the world exists, **objects** utilised by people to satisfy their needs will have the character of commodities, this "scientific truth" shrinks to the level of arbitrary assertion, **mystical**, on the level of **fetish**, that is to say, to the level of a misleading falsehood, different in no respect from those contained in the ideologies and beliefs of pre-bourgeois times from which bourgeois science turned in derision (not that they scoff quite so much anymore, but this phenomenon was to be expected).

Let us follow some of Marx's evocative steps, after having in our turn **anticipated**, with a didactic aim, what he was getting at. The objects of consumption **haven't always** been commodities - today they are affected by a price and a value of exchange which derives from work-time crystallised in them - but they won't always exist as commodities; Once the complete analysis of the capitalist industrial mode of production is made, it can be deduced not only that **it isn't necessary** that all the objects which satisfy the needs of our existence be commodities and be exchanged at their price and value, -but that on the contrary, at a certain moment, **they won't be such anymore**.

From primary school, we know what this statement signifies "politically" (agreed?). It signifies: the capitalist mode of production isn't eternal and it will collapse with the victory of the working class. It will have disappeared as soon as exchange values and commodities don't exist anymore, that's to say when there isn't either mercantile exchange of the objects of consumption, or money anymore.

This signifies something more precise: there cannot exist in the future an economy which is still mercantile but which isn't capitalist anymore. Before capitalism there were economies which were partially mercantile, but capitalism is the last of this genre.

As obstinate adversaries of novelty, we show to those who are able to read properly, **that this was written down**: Let us suppose I have a candle at my disposal, and I need light. I make use of it by lighting it, and in a few hours I will have consumed it. Almost nothing odd there, in the candle or in the light, so

"the mystical character of the commodity doesn't derive from its use value (the property the candle has of giving light). It doesn't derive either from the features which determine the value (so many grams of stearin)".

From whence then derives therefore, Marx asks himself, the **enigmatic** quality that the object of consumption assumes in cloaking the **commodity form**? Evidently from this same form. Do not take for banal what is profound!

The value form, that is the relation which establishes itself between the candle and the fifty francs which we pay for it, isn't a relation between things: between the stearin and the grubby bits of republican paper; but it does **conceal** a social relation between men who participate in production. The mercantile monetary relation **seems** to be a simple means to exchange the

candle that I burn, with let us say, the matches which I produce; it **seems** to be a relation between **products**: in reality it is a relation between **producers**, a social relation, better still a relation between social classes. It is here that Marx unveils the mystery of the commodity "fetish".

"A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour, this is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses".

Marx wanted to best explain this "Journey" in which the innocent candle - as opposed to the dry sticks snapped off the tree and rubbed together by primitive man in his lair - becomes, by assuming an exchange value, the expression of the relationship of exploitation which the owner of the factory makes his workers put up with in the candle factory.

He made a comparison with the stimulation of the retina which appears to us as an object existing exterior to the eye which sees it. But the light radiated by the object and the stimulation of the eye are physical realities, whilst the value form is nothing physical at all, contained neither in the stearin or in the light or stimulation of the optic nerve. The latter is a definite social relation between men, that assumes in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things,

"in order, therefore to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped region of the religious world".

As in mysticism,  
 "the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings"  
 and it is the same with the products  
 "in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities".

Marx, who isn't a man of letters but a fighter, sees the class enemy in front of him with every line he writes. He isn't a "thinker" and he doesn't soliloquise, but writes in dialogue form with his enemy. You thought, oh theoreticians of the bourgeoisie, to have reached the acme of development in, clearing away from the spirit of man the fetishes of beliefs in the divinities which justified the authority of the class to which you have succeeded, but you have set up a new and much sadder fetish which we will throw down in its turn from your altars - the banks - and eject from your temples - the stock exchanges.

"It is, however, just this ultimate money-form of the world of commodities that actually

conceals, instead of disclosing, the social character of private labour, and the social relations between the individual producers. (...) The categories of bourgeois economy consist of such like forms. They are forms of thought expressing with social validity the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production, viz, the production of commodities". All mysticism is dissipated if we refer ourselves to another type of distribution, one that is non market.

We have asked Karl Marx to demonstrate the **transitory** character of mercantile forms and to confirm the annexed thesis: the mercantile forms appeared at a certain stage in history, and it is when they have disappeared that we will be in the Communist stage. Marx then, in the twinkling of an eye, takes us from Robinson Crusoe to the society of the future. It is our standard and usual method: to elaborate the analysis of future development with indisputable data from the past. Would that they - who having read without reading, say that Marx stuck to the prudent science of contemporary facts and gave a mere **photograph** of capitalism of his day - (the imbecile puppy of 1952 knows more about it than Marx of course). Would that they clean their gummy eyelids; realised communism, they will find it on pages 82-3 in Volume 1 of Capital!

Since economy is fond of "robinsonades", let us start from there, said Marx, Robinson had needs and satisfied them with objects that he gathered together: he saved ink, pen and ledger and made an inventory; but...that's all. He didn't engage in double entry book-keeping, nor did he receive or deposit money, for around him there were no commodities of any description. Marx transports us away from

"Robinson's island bathed in light to the European middle-ages shrouded in darkness".

This next part is for you; the liquidators of feudal guilt for the better glory of the brilliant neon civilisation of today. You, who understand only that light comes of light and dark from dark; *deum de deo, lumen de lumine*. For our part, we recognise the necessity for the passage from the light of the early and generous primitive communism, without commodities, to the shadowy society of feudalism, and then onto the fetid sewer of bourgeois civilisation in order to pass beyond it. For us nothing is a **fetish**, not even hatred of capitalism.

Right then, so in the middle-ages, **commodities** still don't exist on a wide scale: the privilege of the dominant class is constituted by openly visible **personal** payments in labour. The **social form** of labour is also its natural form, that's to say, **particularity**, and not as in the mercantile form, **generality**. Let us try to understand this. I have turned the winepress for you and after having stretched yourself out somewhere, you will imbibe a good glassfull. This is less ignoble than buying from the pub the poisoned capitalist liquid, containing water and colouring - to increase the profit-margin.

Clear relations then in the gloomy Middle-ages: the lies of the priest dominate! But, "the tithe to be rendered to the priest is more intelligible than his blessing". The foul conjuring trick of representing the relations of human slavery as an equal relation

between exchangeable things, will be the characteristic feature of the subsequent bourgeois epoch.

But can a human activity exist that is fit to fulfil essential needs without such a modern deception, outside of the **fetish** of the market? Yes, says Marx, and he gives examples for three periods: the past, the present, and the future.

**The past:** Robinson, as an entirely abstract figure used for the purposes of analogy doesn't interest us. Man is **the species**, not **the person**: this bizarre, solitary and evidently sterile being, knows only consumer goods and not exchange, and not finding himself in the Garden of Eden and besides the disadvantage of being deprived of Eve, he procures himself useful goods through his work.

Our example from the past we draw from the primitive communities. Between the "Manifesto" and "Capital", practical archaeological research has established that not only certain peoples, but every one of them, had their origins in organisations based on the work of all and the property of no-one. An organisation where one finds: "labour in common or directly associated labour" in its "spontaneously developed form which we find on the threshold of the history of all civilised races".

## The Present: Of communal work

"We have an example close at hand in the patriarchal industries of a peasant family, that produces corn, cattle, yarn, linen, and clothing for home use. These different articles are, as regards the family, so many products of its labour, but as between themselves, they are not commodities. The different kinds of labour (...) possess a spontaneously developed system of division of labour. The distribution of the work within the family and the regulation of the labour-time of the several members, depend as well upon differences of age and sex, as upon natural conditions varying with the seasons".

On several occasions we have pointed out that these streams of autonomous organisation exist not only in backward areas into which the global market hasn't yet penetrated, but exist still in the bourgeois countries: in 1914, a Calabrian woman, a large landowner, boasted of spending **one penny** a year on needles and buying nothing else. If we weren't dialecticians we would say that our **ideal** is contained in such streams. On the contrary however, we say that the quicker these are swallowed up in the infernal circle of market capital - be it in Calabria or Turkestan - the better.

## The Future

"Let us picture to ourselves, by way of a change, [the moderate tone employed here so as to avoid utopian affectations, blinds superficial people to the fact that it is the **revolutionary programme** being dealt with] a community of free individuals, [for us, on the historical level, free is equivalent to non-salaried] carrying on their work with the means of production in common, in which the labour-power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as the combined labour-power of the community. (...) the total product of our community is a social product. One portion serves as fresh means of production and remains social. But another portion is consumed by the members as means of subsistence. A distribution of this portion amongst them is consequently necessary [Take note! you look for the designation 'into equal parts' but it is not there] The mode of this distribution will vary with the productive organisation of the community, and the degree of historical development attained by the producers".

In order to best establish that this "state of things" (nothing other - oh critics, oh vacant ones - than **Communism**; that **Impossible Communism!**) is the negation of commodity production, Marx makes a comparison by examining one of the ways of dividing things up, i.e.

"the share of each individual producer in the means of subsistence is determined by his labour time"

(this would be the **lower** stage of Communism, as Lenin correctly described it drawing from the critique of the Gotha Programme - which in itself was another formidable **hammering out** of fundamental points). Very well then! Here, within communist organisation,

"the social relations of the individual producers, with regard both to their labour and to its products, are in this case perfectly simple and intelligible, and that with regard not only to production but also to distribution".

The last part of the paragraph deals with ideologies which necessarily reflect the three stages: ancient pre-mercantile economy, mercantile economies, and non-mercantile or socialist economies.

The ancient national religions belong to the first barbarian and semi-barbarian stage based on conditions of despotism and slavery.

The society of the universal market finds an appropriate religion in Christianity, and above all in its bourgeois development, the reformation.

It is only in the third stage, the communist one, that **social life casts off the mystic veil that conceals its social aspect iron itself**. However, as we have noted elsewhere, there is a **but**, "This, however, demands for society a certain material ground-work or set of conditions of existence which in their turn are the spontaneous product of a long and painful process of development".

Marx finishes with a final taunt, by assimilating alongside earlier superstitions, the idiotic "self-knowledge" appropriate to the bourgeois epoch.

He chose Bailey, but we could choose Einaudi. The capitalist scientist speaks thus:

"Value (that's to say, the value of exchange) is a property of things. Wealth (use value) is a property of man."

Thus this capitalist savant is able to scientifically deduce that commodities, and the rich, will exist for ever and ever, amen, (for through **reductio ad absurdum**, Everyone will be rich).

We, who by the revolution will abolish commodities and the rich, will demonstrate to these alleged sages meanwhile, that on the contrary, it is things which have the property of being of use to mankind, and it is people alone and their present relations, which have the mercantile property, such that exchange value expresses an attribute of people - that of being exploiter or exploited.

The more the opinion of official science is enlightened and brought up to data, and the more it concludes that capitalist relations are irreplaceable and "natural", the more we consider it to be intrinsically ridiculous. Its calibre is comparable to the imbecilities that Shakespeare puts into the mouth of his ludicrous character Dogberry:

"to be a well-favoured man surely is the gift of fortune, but to write and read comes by nature".

## Today

With the matter being so simple - but simplicity is hard to achieve, while complex things are well within the capacity of any peddler of culture - there are those who come along and say that "new formulas" are necessary. Why? In order to account for Russia and the encumbrance of the Marxist edifice, and for the fact that over there, whilst the means of production are no longer private, there nevertheless exists a capitalism not different by one Jot from those in the west! The entire international gang of stalinists loudly proclaim that Socialism is to be found there in its complete form. And the entire not less vast capitalist gang proclaim the same thing: communism exists over there; communism being nothing other than central and statist dictatorship over all wealth and over all people (to the horror of those in the wonderful **free world**).

Dear searchers for new formulas, why not go back and have a check over the old formulas, for I rather fancy that instead of convincing you to open an advanced research institute, they will convince you of the necessity of enrolling in a "school for dunces".

It is possible that Demosthenes got over an innate stammer and became a great orator - by dint of stuffing his mouth full of pebbles: But we are more than suspicious of the "cacaglios" of Marxism. You have understood that in neapolitan dialect "cacaglio" means stammerer. Scandalous usage of dialect? Perhaps it was for Stalin who denied that the national language is a transitory class product. But in many cases, dialect is actually nearer to the thought of the



dominated class. Dante strengthened the revolution in the measure that the bourgeois opposed the Tuscan vernacular to the latin of the noble men and the prelates. In Russia the aristocrats mumbled in French whilst the proletarian revolutionaries expounded their ideas in German. Stalin, by ignoring both languages, expressed well the fact that one of the characteristics in the formation of bourgeois power is the extolling of the national language.

One need not hesitate to classify Russia within one of three stages: pre-mercantile, mercantile or socialist. At the time of Engels, the first stage was still manifestly evident, not only in the asiatic principalities, but also in the air - the rural community of European Russia. Was it possible then to graft this Communism of exclusive little islands, primitive and rudimentary, onto the Communism of a modern well equipped society? Engels, who was a great and wise diplomat of the revolution, recalled in presenting the "Manifesto" to the Russians, that Marx had predicted in 1862 that it was a possible point of departure if the Russian antifeudal Revolution signalled the Proletarian revolution in the West. If that didn't occur, or if the signal was insufficient, Russia would have to go through the mercantile phase; this it is in the process of doing at the moment. In fact, the collapse of the fabric of Tsarist feudalism provoked the following result: the swallowing up of all the closed-off little islands of Eastern Europe and Asia - thanks to an accelerated industrialisation of the backward territories - in the irresistible tide of the mercantile system.

And the revolutionary outcome? Marx and Engels had always thought that a second 1848, no longer bourgeois but proletarian, could not be victorious as long as there existed in Russia a powerful feudal army. From 1917, this counter-revolutionary condition is removed.

Like them, we consider that in order to be able to transform the anti-feudal revolution into a proletarian revolution in Russia (Lenin's line), the indispensable condition is a revolutionary victory in Europe.

In 1952, Russia hasn't built Socialism, but capitalism, just as Germany, Austria, and Italy built it after 1846.

Today, England, America, France and the other industrial countries are no longer building domestic capitalisms, but protecting global capitalism. Their respective state machineries working solely in a counter-revolutionary direction, with their arsenals pointed **solely** against the future - not even partly against the past and partly against the future.

We will not elaborate any further here on the question of the mercantile character of the economic organisation rather we will examine in greater detail how the isolated spots within the ocean of general commerce dissolved, by explaining the historical conclusion to be drawn from the fact that in given countries the process is still taking place, while in the territory of others "there are no more economic islands". And we will demonstrate further that this distinction is to be found in the pages of Marx, situated where he develops the history of the passage from

fragmented labour to associated labour, which forms the **necessary** basis of the proletarian revolution and of Communist social organisation.

It has been announced that within two or three years, Russia should be able to exchange with other countries goods with an annual value totalling 40 billion roubles, that is 10 million dollars or 6,300 billion lire.

This Western propaganda would have us believe that this is all just a big hoax, and that this 40 billion will be spent with the sole aim of impressing the electors in the back of beyond, so as to get them to elect a Cominformist mayor.

We would like the tycoons of Western economy to explain to us how it comes about that the captains of industry who have set of f for Moscow have become, not as 'Unità' would romantically have it, suitors at the window but rather **suitors of Potemkin**, [\(1\)](#) that is, mere hirelings.

It would be more worthwhile surely if they discussed other phenomena like the stalinist decision of Truman to requisition the steel industry and to fix prices and wages by state edict - given that there remains a clear margin of 16\$ per ton, or perhaps the phenomena of the founding by the capitalists of an international financial Institution for economic development with the aim of resisting the intervention of governments in their business.

The present development of capitalism towards **profit** is no surprise to the marxist doctrine, and this much is clear: there is not **a single iota** of Socialism in this development, as evidenced by the fact that for bourgeois economy - the economy which is diametrically opposed - this directed politics is "Socialism" **par excellence**. For Vilfredo Pareto for example, Socialism isn't understood to mean the same thing as it does for us, namely organisation without market and without "the firm"; quite the contrary in fact, it is understood as arbitrary intervention of **moral** and **legal** elements within the natural **economic** fact.

(Marxism, on the contrary, maintains the opposite view, namely the **intervention** of economic reality in the shaping of the legal and moral artifice.) At any rate, at least Pareto is consistent when he declares: the Socialist systems, (as he sees them) are not different from the various protectionist systems. These latter, he adds, represent properly speaking, the Socialism of **entrepreneurs and capitalists**. This Socialism, envisaged by Pareto, more than half a century ago, we will willingly leave to Truman and Stalin. Never more than today has it been so obvious that Soviet Socialism is **the Socialism of captains of industry**. But in Russia have these not been suppressed? Well, now they're importing them!

In magnitude, 6300 billion lire is double the size of imports into Great-Britain, six times those into Italy, and equal to those of America. It is equivalent to the annual labour of 26 million workers; of probably all or almost all the Russian workers already drawn into production other

than that of the exclusive little islands, but certainly of the work of the whole population of a developed country with half the population of the present day U.S.S.R. If half of the labour effort of this people - excluding that expended in pre-mercantile asiatic type consumption - has an equivalent price on the global market to that produced by the capitalist countries, other figures are not really needed in order for us to define the Russian economy as capitalist. Moreover, why doubt that it is immersed in fully fledged mercantilism when the ideological projection consists of the complete domination of the popular religiosity which is encouraged and utilised by the public power?

With the dialogue of exchange between the Russian commodity and the dollar which pays for it, and between the American commodity and the rouble which pays for it, we scarcely need to unravel its "fetishistic character". Objects can't talk, commodities can't talk, but where any type of commodity is produced, the relation is, in reality, the relation of the exploitation of wage-earners.

There is nothing to indicate that **at the moment** exchange isn't an open palpable reality. Exchange functioned during the war between 1941 to 1945 under various forms, such as arms and ammunition from the west for industrial and "military" effort and work from the east. Today the respective industries step up the accumulation of capital which is a social fact even in the bourgeois regime, either with the aim of arming for an imperialist war (with Truman invoking reasons of national defence for the requisition of enterprises and the militarisation of strikers) or with the aim of the **mercantile** satisfaction derived from international exchange.

If one wishes to say anything new about Russia, it is more than useless to know that caviar was served at Stalin's table and a millet paté to the workers. This could be compatible with a lower stage of communism. At the higher stage we will give caviar to everyone... and the millet to recalcitrant pupils who have an incurable itch to play at being teacher.

For our part, we are interested to ask ourselves if by having roubles in our pockets we can have caviar or millet, and whether, once the exchange rate is worked out, we can do the same with dollars or lire.

After this, for us the fetish quality of caviar or millet contains no more secrets, as indeed nor does the supremely stupid character of the latest jargon!

## Notes

1 Fiancés de Potemkin = allusion to Catherine II of Russia and her favourite of the moment Potemkin. At the time of a journey of the Empress across the Russian countryside, Potemkin conceived a collapsible village which he could transport across Russia, and which he used to take Catherine to visit each time she wished to see the state of the peasants. With

the surroundings changed at each visit, Catherine thus received a very favourable impression of the state of the Russian countryside and of her subjects.

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**[Bordiga Archive](#)**

Amadeo Bordiga 1953

# The Spirit of Horsepower

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**HTML Mark-up:** Andy Blunden 2003.

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The main aim of our considerations of various subjects — which makes it indispensable to continually repeat the facts remembered from basic “theorems”, even better if it’s with the same words and phrases — is the criticism of the frenzy around the “unforeseen” and deformed forms of very modern capitalism which supposedly compel a reconsideration of the bases of the “perspective” and thus of the marxist method itself.

This false position can easily be related to the refusal to recognise, or even with a total ignorance of, the essential outlines of our doctrine and its basic points.

The whole discussion now underway on revolutionary forms in Russia and China boils down to the judgement to be made of the historical phenomenon of the “appearance” of industrialism and mechanisation in huge areas of the world previously dominated by landed and precapitalist forms of production.

Constructing industrialism and mechanising things is supposedly the same as building socialism whenever central and “national” plans are made. This is the mistaken thesis.

Classically, marxism historically identifies mechanisation with capitalism. The difference between the employment of mechanical forces in a capitalist society and in a socialist one is not quantitative, it does not lie in the fact that technical and economic management passes from restricted circles to a complete circle. It is qualitative and consists in the total *overthrow* of the capitalist characteristics of the use of machines by human society, something much more thoroughgoing and which consists in a “relationship between men” in opposition to the cursed “factory system” and the social division of labour.

Three historical forms: industrialism in autonomous enterprises, industrialism in increasingly concentrated enterprises and then commonly managed enterprises, socialism; all three were foreseen and described by Marx “from the very start”. Nothing has occurred which was unforeseen and which lies beyond the bounds of the analysis which outlined this once and for all. Damn those who talk about dogmas. There has yet to be a renegade who did not use this word. Mao Tse Tung compared it with “cow shit”. Well, bon appetit!

# Yesterday

## Man and the machine

John Stuart Mill, one of the prophets of capital, stated in his classic ‘Principles of Political Economy’ (London, 1821) that it remained to be seen if mechanical inventions had lightened the labour of any human being. Marx sets out from this quotation in his study of mechanisation. For the first time in the field of the social sciences the discussion began with a radical shifting of the way the arguments were *formulated*. The question as to whether the machine was a blessing or a curse would at best remain a nice theme for literature. Marx concentrates on and immediately orientates the question to the *capitalist use* of machines. Such a use *is in no way* aimed at the reduction of the labour of the human species. “Like every other instrument for increasing the productivity of labour, machinery is intended to cheapen commodities and, by shortening the part of the working day in which the worker works for himself, to lengthen the other part, the part he gives to the capitalist for nothing.” This rigorous definition (at the beginning of Capital, Volume I, Chapter 15) as ever contains within it, and one can easily see this, the communist *programme*. Will *we* do without machines and so punish them for performing such swindles? The opposite is the case: in the first period we will use them as and when we can so as to raise production costs and to reduce the amount of time in which the worker works for the capitalist, and then later “to increase the productive capacity of labour”, but not in order to have lunatic quantities of products, but so as to use less labour.

Always testing the *anti-metaphysical* method, the footnote on this page is delightful on the subject of lightening the labour of *which particular human being*.

“Mill should have said, ‘of any human being not fed by other people’s labour’, for there is no doubt that machinery has greatly increased the number of distinguished idlers.”[\[1\]](#)

So if the thesis that “machines were indispensable for arriving at the communist revolution” is marxist, the commonplace of the marxist apology for modern mechanisation is the effect of a banal and impotent reading.

Marx stated that the starting points of “the industrial revolution” in the mode of production are *labour power* in manufacturing and *instruments of labour* in large factories. Labour power is the workers, which even in manufacturing take up *tools* and thus have *instruments of labour*. Let us patiently follow the text in the “analysis” of the characteristics of the new *instrument of labour* which we can call the *machine*. We come to understand that the capitalist social and political revolutions occurring before the eighteenth century, that is, when the instrument of labour was prevalently a *hand tool* and not a *machine*, determined social relations of *labour power* (of workers) and political relations which were necessarily and *predictably* different to those of the capitalist industrial revolutions (Russia, China) of the twentieth century in which

the *instrument of labour* is mechanical on a gigantic scale. They nevertheless remain historically capitalist and bourgeois revolutions. An orgy of mechanisation is one thing, “the building of socialism” another. Even in these cases — let us jump ahead a little — the arrival of the machine-god inevitably brought the bourgeois system of “factory autocracy” and the worship of commodity production. This is historically going in the *opposite direction* to that to be taken by the socialist revolution which we await, as did Marx, with the same *forms* which we find described in our Bible — *Capital*. Blind rage of every bourgeois “free spirit”!

That progress made in instruments of labour is available to all above and beyond frontiers and a series of generations is not our precious discovery. Science belongs to all, but today only to all the capitalist powers. Only tomorrow will it belong to all the human species, of the anti-Mill kind.

*A footnote:*

“Science, generally speaking, costs the capitalist ‘nothing’, a fact that by no means prevents him from exploiting it. ‘Alien’ science is incorporated by capital just as ‘alien’ labour is. But ‘capitalist’ [in quotation marks in the original] appropriation and ‘personal’ appropriation, whether of science or of material wealth, are totally different things.”[\[2\]](#)

Little men, think it over for forty minutes. Marx proved the thesis with the fact that the individual capitalist, the expropriator and exploiter, is, in many cases, a complete and utter idiot when it comes down to technical questions. We would like to invite you no longer to be surprised by the fact that even if in Russia there is no longer any (?) *personal* appropriation of others’ labour (wealth), that does not mean that there is not the full *capitalist* appropriation of it, the Russian capitalist state having obviously been able to appropriate *for nothing* western *science*. It therefore had at its disposal all the mechanical and technical inventions and thus could leap over the long development leading from the artisan’s workshop through independent small-scale industry; but it did not simultaneously make the fanciful leap over *the capitalist historical and social* form of production. But had Marx imagined this leap to have been possible? Yes, given the condition that the united “anational” revolutionary forces had available comparable territories, one of fully developed industrialism (e.g. Germany), the other of as yet undeveloped industrialism (e.g. Russia). Lacking this particular relation, there *must* intervene a period of capitalism’s growth, presenting itself more as an advance in geographical space than in the succession of time, as a conquest more in quantity than in quality or in the chain of evolutive stages.

## Work and Energy

Let us return to the little doctrine. In an organism like the Roman church that has reached two

thousand years (by now we do not think we will get rid of it earlier), the infallible pope teaches nothing, the parish priest teaches everything. Laugh if you like, idiot, there is nothing to laugh about.

Marx started to define the machine with concepts from physics and went on to historical ones, which are useful in unravelling the huge enigma of the man-machine relationship.

The mechanical theory of the *simple machine* deals with those instruments or devices that *modify* into a more convenient form the energy applied to them by an agent, which may also be the hand of man: they do not produce new energy but merely return what is put into them. They are the lever, wedge, pulley etc. A man cannot shift a rock weighing a ton with his own strength, but he can if he takes a long lever to it. He cannot split it into smaller parts that can be lifted, but if he can use a wedge driven in with hammer blows he can.

Socially one can say that a simple machine is one on which one cannot base business. Classical political economy knows that labour is value. Labour (the quantity of labour) is the same thing as mechanical energy. The physicist says: force times distance (movement of the rock) gives us energy. The economist says: the number of workers multiplied by their labour time gives us value. So as long as we use only the muscle power of workers in production, the *simple machines* — to which can correctly be added both socially and mechanically the *tools* which the independent artisan handles — nothing changes. With the lever, that man moves the rock ten metres in eight hours: eight workers without a lever would have rolled it the same distance in an hour.

Mechanically one could say that the *compound machine*, meaning a greater or lesser complex of simple machines (wheels, levers, cogs etc.), does not provide new energy, while motor machines, which transform the heat of fuel and other forms of energy into mechanical energy do so. Now it would be to make a present of *value* to permit the elimination of so much *labour* that has to be performed physically by men. But it would be so *only* with communist mechanisation: in *capitalist* mechanisation, the energy relation, which is physically true, is socially *incorrect*.

As long as mechanical energy is introduced so as to produce more commodities and not to employ less human time in labour, we have to say that the transition, whatever the ideological and juridical presentation, is a capitalist process.

So Marx defined the difference between the tool of the craftsman's social period and the *machine* of the capitalist period not on the basis of the use of muscle power substituted by other energy, but by naming as machines in a social sense not only the *motor* machines of the various contemporary industries and factories, but also the *transmitters* of energy (a series of simple machines that add no energy) and the *working* machines applied to the raw material to be transformed and which vulgar technology calls *machine tools* (lathe, press, punch etc.). Moreover, we have already reached the phase of mechanisation even when the new *working*



machines are not yet set in motion by mechanical energy, but by human muscle power: crank and pedal driven machines.

If it were not so, Marx said, we should have to say that the machine driven by non-human energy existed long before the capitalist factory.

Man, in fact learnt very soon how to adopt other natural energy. A simple two-ox plough is no longer a tool, but a proper machine which allows a man to plough a greater area than that he can dig over with a spade.

But then, Marx said, Claussen's circular loom, with which a single worker weaves ninety-six picks a minute, though used by a modern, not a primitive, man, would be a tool as it is set in motion by hand, just as is Wyatt's spinning machine. They became machines only from the moment that the former was set in motion by a motor and the latter, as from 1735, by ... a donkey.

The animal was one of the first *natural* energy sources used by man to help in production, and from earliest times. But there were others too: the wind and running water.

One cannot therefore call these sporadic and scattered cases of the use of mechanical energy, instead of human muscle power, capitalist mechanisation, but instead the introduction of the machine tool which long preceded that of the mechanical motor (the steam engine).

"It is this last part of the machinery, the tool or working machine, with which the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century began. And to this day it constantly serves as the starting-point whenever a handicraft or a manufacture is turned into an industry carried on by machinery."[\[3\]](#)

Let us take a step back. With the *trade*, that is, with the independent, isolated artisan worker, we are in precapitalism, in the guild-feudal regime. With *manufacture*, we have already arrived at full capitalism. The conditions noted have in fact been realised: concentration of a mass of workers, capital in the hands of a master who can rent buildings, acquire materials and pay wages. Even before mechanisation, simple manufacture has changed to *organised* manufacture with the technical division of labour among various operations which, even with simple hand tools, are carried out by different craftsmen on the uncontestable order of the 'master'. This name from the time of slavery is reborn, ignobly substituting the less hateful "Sir". The Sir was a living and fighting knight, a human being, the master in the end becomes a monstrous *automaton*.

## The factory autocrat

We read in Marx not an apology, but an implacable indictment of the capitalist factory system. The *instruments of labour*, as long as they could be handled by a single craftsman's hand, were also, oh modern idealist sins, of his mind and a bit of his heart.

Today the craftsman's tool has been substituted by the machine tool. Marx said:

“As we have seen, the machine does not drive out the *tool*. Rather does the tool expand and multiply, changing from a dwarf implement of the human organism to the implement of a mechanism created by man. Capital now sets the worker to work, not with a manual tool, but with a machine which itself handles the tools”[\[4\]](#)

The huge growth in the power of human labour is accompanied by the degradation, not the uplifting, of the working man. The Jenny Mule was the name given to a spinning machine with innumerable spindles. With technological progress in 1863, thanks to a motor of barely one horse-power, two and a half workers were enough for 450 rotating spindles and produced 3666 pounds of spun cotton a week. With a hand spinning-wheel, the same amount of cotton would have required 27,000 hours instead of 150: productivity rose 180 fold! We cannot follow and develop these comparisons Marx made here, applying them, for example, to calculating how many navvies are replaced by digging and rolling machines imported here by the Americans after the war to construct roads.

Dr. Ure gives us two definitions of the factory. On the one hand he describes it as:

“combined co-operation of many orders of work people, adult and young, in tending with assiduous skill a system of productive machines continuously impelled by a central power' (prime mover)”

and on the other hand as:

“a vast automaton composed of various mechanical and intellectual organs, acting in uninterrupted concert for the production of a common object, all of them being subordinate to a self-regulated moving force'.” [\[5\]](#)

Marx shows that:

“the second is characteristic of its use by capital and therefore of the modern factory system.” [\[6\]](#)

The first could, however, correspond to our programme: “the combined collective worker, or the social labour body, appears as the dominant subject, and the mechanical automaton as the object.”

But today instead

“the automaton itself is the subject, and the workers are merely conscious organs, co-ordinated with the unconscious organs of the automaton”

Have you heard, you liberal liberators of bodies, spirits and consciences, who accuse us of automatising life!?

“Ure therefore prefers to present the central machine from which the motion comes as not only an automaton but an autocrat. ‘In these spacious halls the benignant power of steam summons around him his myriads of willing menials’.”

Doesn't the centrality of the concept show for the hundredth time that it is not a question of describing capitalism, as even Stalin pretends, but of discovering the social characteristics that the revolution will have to do away with? Here are other passages.

“In handicrafts and manufacture, the worker makes use of a tool; in the factory the machine makes use of him. ... In manufacture the workers are parts of a living mechanism. In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism which is independent of the workers, who are incorporated into it as its living appendages.” [7]

A further comparison of Fourier's of the factory with a mitigated gaol, which the chapter closes with, recalls that in the *galley*, [8] the rowers were incorporated into the ship, chained for life to their benches: they had to row or sink with it.

“Every kind of capitalist production[or even manufacture], in so far as it is not only a labour-process, but also a process of creating surplus-value, has this in common, that it is not the worker that employs the instruments of labour, but the instruments of labour that employ the worker [programme: the collective socialist-worker will himself dominate the instruments of his work!]. But it is only in the factory system that this inversion for the first time acquires *technical* and palpable *reality*. By means of its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confronts the labourer, during the labour-process, *in the shape of capital*, of dead labour, that dominates, and pumps dry, living labour-power.” [9]

A cold description, is it not, you band of vulgar falsifiers?

The *physical person* of the individual master is thus *not* required, and bit by bit he disappears into the pores of share capital, of management boards, of state-run boards, of *the political state*, which has become (since a long time ago) entrepreneur and manufacturer, and into the very latest vile form of the state which pretends to be “the workers themselves” and thus is able to tie them to the feet of the sinister steel automatons.

Factory despotism: only the communist revolution will tear it up by the roots when there is no longer intoxicating involvement in “struggles for political freedom” and similar *popular* mirages, denounced in bourgeois industrialism from its very beginning, accompanied by real

class revolutions, but made up with stinking democratic rouge. Not a syllable is to be touched of the sentence that we have had ready formulated for ninety years, and which unfortunately is still not ready to be carried out.

“... unaccompanied by either that division of responsibility otherwise so much approved of by the bourgeoisie, or the still more approved representative system. This code is merely the capitalist caricature of the social regulation of the labour process which becomes necessary in co-operation on a large scale and in the employment in common of instruments of labour, and especially of machinery. The overseer’s book of penalties replaces the slave-driver’s lash.” [\[10\]](#)

The latest liberal phantasms; autocracy and dictatorship, “in life” and not in the pallid legal lie, did not *begin again* with Mussolini, Hitler, Franco... not even with Stalin and his proconsuls, not even with Truman, Eisenhower and the stupid slaves of *United Europe*: they are a technical fact linked to the beat of huge central generators turning on the banks of the Hudson, Thames, Moscow and the Pearl River.

## Machine and revolution

But “the machine is innocent of the misery it brings with it”. Here a marvellous page shows the stupidity of the official economists who, being unable to explain the huge antagonisms springing from the use of machines, pretend to ignore them and close their eyes to the fact that:

“... machinery in itself shortens the hours of labour, but when employed by capital it lengthens them ... in itself it lightens labour, but when employed by capital it heightens its intensity ... in itself it is a victory of man over the forces of nature, but in the hands of capital it makes man a slave of those forces ... in itself it increases the wealth of the producers, but in the hands of capital it makes them into paupers ... Therefore whoever reveals the real situation with the capitalist employment of machinery does not want machinery to be employed at all, and is an enemy of social progress!” [\[11\]](#)

The machine, which in the hands of the working collectivity will be a source of wellbeing and rest, becomes a killer in the hands of capital. We do not condemn the machine for this.

Here Marx quotes a character from Charles Dickens’s famous novel *Oliver Twist*. It is the self-defence of the great rogue Bill Sykes:

“Gentlemen of the jury, no doubt the throat of this commercial traveller has been cut. But that is not my fault, it is the fault of the knife. Must we, for such a temporary inconvenience, abolish the use of the knife? Only consider! Where would agriculture and trade be without the knife? Is it not as salutary in surgery, as it is skilled in anatomy? And a willing assistant at the festive table? If you abolish the knife — you hurl us back into the depths of barbarism.” [\[12\]](#)

No. We will not fall back into *total barbarism* and such a risk does not worry us. We will merely take from your hands the handle of the knife-machine.

The machine will be precious tomorrow in a non-mercantile mode of production and its appearance has been equally precious in fact for the revolutionary antagonisms which it created between capital and the proletariat.

“There is also no doubt that those revolutionary ferments whose goal [the programme, you deaf ones] is the *abolition* of the old *division of labour* stand in diametrical contradiction with the *capitalist form of production*, and the economic situation of the workers which corresponds to that form. However, the development of the contradictions of a given historical form of production is the only historical way in which it can be dissolved and then reconstructed on a new basis.” [\[13\]](#)

Still another invective against “the division of labour” which communism will bury. Dialectically it was wise at the time of the guilds: *nec sutor ultra crepidam*, cobbler stick to your last! But:

“‘*Nec sutor ultra crepidam*’, a phrase which was the absolute summit of handicraft wisdom, became sheer nonsense from the moment when the watchmaker Watt invented the steam-engine, the barber Arkwright the throstle” [\[14\]](#)

And it is also with a battle cry that we close this part of Marx’s work after the detailed examination of the social legislation on work and the shortening of the working day:

“is to increase the anarchy and the proneness to catastrophe of capitalist production as a whole, the intensity of labour [Stakhanov! Stakhanov!], and the competition of machinery with the worker. By the destruction of small-scale and domestic industries it destroys the last resorts of the ‘redundant population’, thereby removing what was previously a safety-valve for the whole social mechanism. By maturing the material conditions and the social combination of the process of production, it matures the contradictions and antagonisms of the capitalist form of that process, and thereby ripens both the elements for forming a new society and the forces tending towards the overthrow of the old one.” [\[15\]](#)

## Today

# From horsepower to the kilowatt

Marx fully established, on the basis of the technological elements of his time, that the introduction of mechanical motive power (better, energy) accelerates the concentration of productive activities into huge factories and that the factory labour legislation itself acted in this

way:

“... thus artificially ripen the material elements necessary for the conversion of the manufacturing system into the factory system, yet at the same time, because they make it necessary to lay out a greater amount of capital, they hasten the decline of the small masters, and the concentration of capital.” [\[16\]](#)

We have cited many times the famous passage from the chapters on accumulation, which is illustrated, for example, by the technical modifications occurring in steel making:

“In any given branch of industry centralisation would reach its extreme limit if all the individual capitals invested there were fused into a single capital. In a given society this limit would be reached only when the entire social capital was united in the hands of either a single capitalist or a single capitalist company.” [\[17\]](#)

Engels transposed this perspective to the trusts, the monopolies and the state managers in a no less notorious manner.

If the commodity laws themselves, confluent in the production of surplus value, provided Marx with the basis of the demonstration, fully confirmed by history, of gigantic capitalist accumulation in colossal amounts, the new technical forms of producing motor power have an equally important influence.

As long as we are referring to the steam engine, the first case of large scale employment of mechanical power in production, we see that the best solution is autonomy for each factory to produce the amount of energy required. The power station changed everything, especially after the massive extraction of fossil fuel, made imposing in turn both by machines and by the capitalist form of mine management (once it was largely state owned). Before then the cost *per* horsepower clearly became decreasingly small as the boiler became increasingly large, and thus there is another reason for the small factory to be subjected to the large one. Nevertheless, no organisational link was imposed between factories as all could get coal on the “open market”.

All this changed enormously with the progress of electro-mechanisation. The advantage of *making energy into a commodity* became decisive with the creation of a transmitted electrical supply. Every factory now tends not to *produce*, but to *buy* its energy.

Ure’s *central motor* could control the working machines along with the men made slaves to them, but within a small radius: that allowed by transmission by means of “simple mechanisms” — pulleys, belts, conical gears... No one had even thought it useful to distribute steam under pressure to other machines through long ducts, the huge heat loss making such a system uneconomical.

Let us offer an example: supposing natural methane gas had been found before the discovery

of dynamic electricity and electrical current. This, too is a fossil fuel of organic origin, like the solid and liquid ones. But, unlike them (the liquid one can be piped as a commodity, but not as a fuel, for technical and economic reasons), it can be distributed through a mains system. From this fact would have emerged the need for a close organisational link between all the factories fed by a single distribution system.

In fact, the energy consumed by each individual factory can no longer be varied at the will of the local management as it could cause the single power station to run out of energy or to have to “throw it away”. Instead, the capitalist with the factory based on autonomous motive power could cut out burners and boilers at his pleasure, or install others to increase production.

As the whole plan of employing workers, the slaves of the machine tools, depends on that of the energy provided, the entire social industrial mechanism falls into line with these new norms, it links up, centralises and subordinates itself to an infinity of rules.

## Planning is not socialist!

Such an adaptation to, and the discipline of, general networks is not a change in the historical type of production: the factory is still the factory, the worker is still the wage-labourer, the compulsion of the factory automaton increases rather than diminishes. The general norms from which thousands and thousands of special laws emerged is not a social revolution. It is useless for the reader immersed in modern life to extend the comparison of motive power for factories and plants that produce manufactured goods to the thousand other communication, transport, and all types of service networks.

Even antiquity administered motors that were not autonomous. The domesticated animal was undoubtedly autonomous and the farm or small-holding was all the stronger for the number of horses or oxen it possessed. The windmill was autonomous, but, however, depended on nature’s whim.

Not autonomous, at least not over a long tract of the same water course — river or “industrial canal” — was the water mill. And here laws of very old states provided a clear discipline so that no one could modify the lay out of weirs to consume more hydraulic energy than the grindstone, for example, up or down stream. A sentence or a commission abolishing privileges in Calabria in 1810 stated *inter alia*: “All can install hydraulic machinery as long as they do not cause any damage and loss to previously existing hydraulic machines.”

Giacchino Murat’s<sup>[18]</sup> regime was extremely liberal. Imagine a modern regime as liberal as this that says: anyone is free to install electrical machinery and to plug it into the first electrical cable that comes to hand!



In all periods, then, public authority has had to regulate and co-ordinate productive activities and energy sources, all the more so when their dependence on a single network, on the same material flow of energy provision, became technically inevitable; and there is a full parallel between the flow from a certain head of water and that of electrons from a conductor at a given voltage.

And now then, forgetting for a moment the unfolding of particular historical episodes and the names of the mercenaries, let us ask ourselves what a social organisation in power which had to industrialise a still backward country would do. Naturally it would not await the repetition of a slow development from guilds lacking work co-operation to manufacture without machine tools to the factory with machine tools but without steam engines to large scale industry with its own boiler. It would pass directly to the building of electrical power stations, and, as far as possible, hydroelectric ones, using the modern methods of applied science to control water, creating heads of water later to be distributed in given amounts, clearly fixed in a plan of the project, to individual factories that were to produce manufactured goods for consumption.

The same mercantile motive as that of competition on the world market in the acquisition of what is indispensable for such plant thus operates for the supposed authority because every other way would be more costly and would imply greater funding and use of savings “on imports”.

The pretended differences between Russian capitalism and the one which developed, let us say, in England, France, Germany and America, thus do not consist in and do not mean a step towards a different social form which escapes from the despotic factory system and the social division of labour and the frantic work intensity, but instead consist in the most rapid and direct way of arriving at this very system.

History is there to tell us that on 22-29 December 1921 at the Eighth Congress of the Soviets, the foundations were laid for planned industrialisation, adopting the electrification programme of which, it is noted, Lenin was a chief proponent.

## Thought and history

Despite the availability to man of new powerful means provided by the domination of electrical energy, the social law of transition from one type of production to another has not been broken. Autonomous or centrally planned, steam or electrified, the productive mechanism under construction in the USSR is capitalist.

Can the discoveries of pure and applied science emerging from the human brain change and form the course of history? We can ask ourselves if the form of atomic power, given that in a handful of material which is now inert there lie millions more horse power and kilowatts than in



the entire course of a huge river, permits the return to local autonomous factories and to the “liberal” economy, with an analogous human ideology. That cannot happen and, besides, the means to unleash such an eruption of energy, breaking open the first nuclei, consists in energy from an electro-mechanical source at such a voltage, a thousand times higher than those of the industrial motor which enslaves human arms and brains, that no group of capitalists, but only the political state can put it in place.[\[19\]](#)

An immense path leads from the modest horse, first a beast of burden, then through horse power, which turned the spinning machine, to the millions of volts in the huge “cyclotron”. But Marx had already recalled in the section we’ve studied that Descartes and Bacon, for whom work animals were “machines” and who were ideological precursors of capitalism, maintained that “altered methods of thought would result in an alteration in the shape of production, and practical subjugation of nature by man”. Descartes in his *‘Discours sur la methode’* makes the prophecy that:

“in place of the speculative philosophy taught in the schools, one can find a practical philosophy by which, given that we know the powers and the effectiveness of fire water, air, the stars ... as well and as *accurately* as we know the various trades of our craftsmen, we shall be able to employ them in the same manner as the latter to all those uses to which they are adapted ...” thereby contributing “to the perfection of human life.” [\[20\]](#)

From Marx onwards, we have placed such a realisation at the end of the difficult historical course, but we do not maintain that the creative forces of thought generate new productive forces, rather that the development and conflict of social processes are reflected in the conquests of thought.

It is therefore useless to use the will, dream or illusion or the hundred ways of deforming thought and opinion to change the name of the fact and of the inexorable process, and to pretend that merely by exploiting the “mechanical intelligence” of modern capitalism, as an obedient Cartesian pupil who goes further than his master, one can succeed in identifying a system of capitalist compression of man and labour with the *perfection of life*. For this — at the present moment in history — the work of the mind is inadequate, and instead one needs another social war, conducted by men against men, classes against classes.

## Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) *Capital* Vol. I p. 492

[\[2\]](#) *ibid.* p. 508

[\[3\]](#) *ibid.* p. 494

[4] *ibid.* p. 509

[5] *ibid.* p. 544

[6] *ibid.* p. 545

[7] *ibid.* p. 548

[8] *Galera* means both galley and prison.

[9] *ibid.* p. 548

[10] *ibid.* p. 550

[11] *ibid.* p. 569

[12] *ibid.* p. 569 (quoting Dickens)

[13] *ibid.* p. 619

[14] *ibid.* p. 619

[15] *ibid.* p. 635

[16] *ibid.* p. 607

[17] *ibid.* p. 779

[18] Murat introduced Napoleonic legislation to Southern Italy.

[19] Publisher's note - This passage seems to confuse nuclear fission in a reactor - brought about by bringing together a large quantity of naturally fissile material (Uranium-235 or Plutonium) in a small space so as to create a "chain reaction" - with the shattering of atomic nuclei which can be carried out by accelerating particles in a cyclotron using very high voltages, but the comments about the huge investment required to establish it are correct.

[20] *ibid.* p. 513

Amadeo Bordiga 1956

# Weird and Wonderful Tales of Modern Social Decadence

(Lax and uncaring technology — Parasitic and pillaging management)

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## Andrea Doria

The safety of sea travellers seemed, with good reason, to have been assured for the future, both historically and scientifically, by the first application of mechanical motors to ships, and all the more so with the construction of metal hulls. After a century and a half of technical “improvement”, the safety of the passenger is now relatively greater when compared with the old wooden sailing boats which were prey to both wind and sea. Naturally the “achievement”, the most idiotic one, is speed, even if special clippers in about 1850 won the “blue ribands” from steam ships, while there was — then too — not insignificant playing the cotton exchange between Boston and London. The faster the thief, the more a thief; but a quicker fool is no less a fool.

Nevertheless the period of the greyhounds of the sea lies behind us — it corresponded to the period after the First World War. Even before this war huge tonnages had been reached. The Titanic, which went down by the bows in 1912<sup>[1]</sup>, was over 50,000 tons although it’s true that the speed during its maiden voyage, during which it struck an iceberg, did not exceed 18 knots. After a half-century there have been only two cases of liners on the North Atlantic (be they French, English, German or Italian) much over 50,000 tons. Since the last war the largest launched was the United States (53,000 tons). The two exceptions are the English “Queen Mary” (81,000 tons) and “Queen Elizabeth” (84,000 tons), keels laid before the war and still in use<sup>[2]</sup>. The brand new American ship took the blue riband from the English one which in turn had won it from the French “Normandie” in 1938, the latter being destroyed in the war. Sailing speeds in the last period have risen above 30 knots. The Andrea Doria, the largest post-war Italian ship along with its sister ship Colombo (the pre-war Rex was 51,000 tons) was only 29,000 tons but with a good top speed.

Thus the race to have the biggest ship, which was the prelude to the great disaster, has ceased, but so too that for the fastest speed which so enthralled Italy during the fascist period. The reason is that the person in a hurry can take a plane which, with its small crew, does not kill off more than fifty a go. The sea crossing (with sun and fine weather on the southern route preferred after the Titanic disaster) is more a pleasure trip or cruise — the hugely powerful engines required to thrust these massive giants at enormous cost (one knot is gained and a few hours are knocked off the crossing, wasting thousands of extra horse-power and increasing fuel consumption in proportion) at a rate of knots, are no longer requested by passengers and do not suit the company. Thus the logic of the situation now shows that it is best to build middle size middling speed ships for the passengers who are not at the summit of (economic and political) business dealings and so are not forced to fly. The newspapers told us that the unfortunate passengers saved from the Andrea Doria did not want to return by air: once bitten, twice shy, by the great civilisation of technology....

Besides, if visibility is bad, it is still a good idea to go slowly, even if there is radar aboard.

This is not the central question, that instead is the extreme fragility of the Doria's hull as was shown by the collision with the not so heavy or fast Stockholm, whatever one may say about the ice breaking prow which could mechanically make a deep hole, but less lacerating and much shorter. Evidently the Doria broke, probably because it was too weak throughout its structure, its ribs and backbone. Only by supposing that a long longitudinal section of the hull came away can we explain why so many air-tight flotation compartments (closed for the fog) collapsed along with so many vital parts — machines, oil tanks and so forth.

It is not only with ships that the mania of modern technology is oriented towards economising on the structure, using light metal sections with the pretext of ever more modern materials with miraculous strength, guaranteed more by insolent advertising and sleight of hand than the checks run by the bureaucratised laboratories and standards institutions. Just as with the construction of land vehicles, the ship produced by developed modern technology is not as solid as that of 50 years ago. The wonderful ship thus broke up and sank in record time, contrary to the experts' predictions. With a rough sea and less passing ships, it could have become a massacre.

There is another reason apart from the builders' false economies. It is known that for nationalistic and demagogic reasons the Italian state (who does not know that after Holy Russia, the largest dose of "socialist" industry is to be found in Vatican Italy, even though Palmiro[3] is not altogether happy?) was both the buyer and the producer of the ship (both the Compagnia Navigazione Italia and the Ansaldo shipbuilders belong to the state). It is well known that steel costs more in Italy and labour too (the worker eats less here, but national assistance grabs the lot). Ordering the ship from a Dutch or German yard would have cost a quarter less, but Palmiro would have had fewer votes. The Italian engineers had an interest in, and orders to be, stingy

with the steel.

They were not stingy enough though with the decorative and luxurious architecture. One of the symptoms of the worldwide decline of technology is that architecture kills engineering. All civilisations go through this stage, from Nineveh to Versailles.

Old sea dogs moaning on the Genova quayside told reporters this. Too many saloons, swimming pools, playing areas, too many decks above the waterline — ah, the inimitable line, the slender outline of Italian ships — too much weight and space put into the superstructure, that is the half skyscraper which stands above the waves, full of windows flooding out light where the luxury class has a good time. This all at the expense of the quickwork, the part in contact with the water, whose size and strength provide stability, flotation, course correction after wandering, resistance to attacks by the sea, collisions with mountains of ice, and those with ships from countries where steel costs less and, perhaps, where technology hasn't sold out so much to wheeler-dealing politics... yet.

All this, grumble the old sailors, is at the expense of safety. More or less vulgar luxury or the safety of the human lives on board, this is the anti-thesis. But could such an antithesis hold back Civilisation and Progress!?

However, when steerage class is unsafe and the crew are too, then even first class, with the most expensive tickets, is unsafe as well. The rhetoric goes on about modern discoveries, high technology, the extolled unsinkability, the resistance to collision with ice, rocks, Stockholms.

It was the same story with the rehabilitation of the great cities, from which, as Marx and Engels stated from the time of the gutter of Paris, Haussmann, the poor had and will have everything to lose and nothing to gain. The upper bourgeoisie was told by clever technicians and speculators that epidemics do not know class divisions, even in a rich man's house one can die of cholera. So get on with it, Demolition Joe! So now when the ship goes down, so too do the first class passengers, half clad like the poor devils, hardly toggled up in their dinner jackets. Safety is therefore vital to all: one cannot simply say "stuff it!" like in a mine where only the scapegoats of labour and a handful of engineers go, but without the benefits of decoration — after all it's dark down there.

The ruling class, for its part incapable of struggling against the devil of business activity, superproduction and superconstruction for its own skin, thus demonstrates the end of its control over society, and it is foolish to expect that, in the name of a progress with its trail indicated by bloodstains, it can produce safer ships than those of the past.

And in fact the eddies around the sad hull of the Andrea Doria had scarcely stilled when the nationalised economy, the perfect hothouse of modern private business dealing and parasitism, announced that it would be ready to produce another one, changing only, for reasons of

superstition, the name! They boast that since the cost will rise to about one third more than that of the old ship, they will economise on design, calculations and trials! The decorators will, most certainly, do as good a business as before, and the machine to thief money from the man in the street has already been set in motion. Just as after the Second World War, during the reconstruction, strengthened by all the resources of modern advanced technology, “the business deal of the century” came about, thus too the shipbuilding and shipping “crisis” is resolved (for which a new law was being prepared) with the order for a new ship. After the ramming by the Stockholm, and perhaps a few more litres of alcohol consumed by its representatives, the wise and well-meaning vote of our Democratic Parliament was verified.

No one will think, no one will legislate, no one will vote for tearing up the old calculations and for redesigning the hull and its structure, the only part of the ship that is quickwork, forking out five million more for steel and five million less for pandering artifices. This will not be the case while “socialist” and enterprise production, even if by the state, is the slave of mercantile and competitive considerations, between the “flags”, that is, between the bands of business criminals, which is the same thing. And whoever were to do so would be “deprecating” the unsunk Colombo.

## Marcinelle

While the series on the agrarian question and the theory of ground rent according to Marx was being published in these columns<sup>[4]</sup>, there was the disaster at Ribolla which caused 42 victims against the now certain 250 at Charleroi. Exactly the same economic theory of absolute and differential rent can be applied to the extraction of minerals from the subsoil and to the development of hydroelectric power as to agricultural land. One “works” a mine just as one works a farm. We called the paragraph of the exposition “Ribolla, or differential death”.

In the capitalist world’s economy, all consumers of the produce of nature pay a higher price for it than for the product of labour. For the latter, they pay for the labour and for a margin of surplus-labour that competition, as long as it lasts, tends to reduce. And bourgeois society offers this product to its members at a lower price than that existing in previous societies which were little involved in manufacturing.

The produce of land, in the same way, is paid for by the consumer according to the labour and the surplus-labour, established on the basis of the “worst land”. But, in this case, one also pays a third part: rent, that is the award for the monopoly over land, to the landowner, the third force in the “model” bourgeois society. The least fertile land dictates the market price to all consumers of foodstuffs. It thus follows that the monopoly landowner of richer land adds on to the absolute rent (the minimum) the differential rent, rent due to lower labour costs, so that the market pays the same price.

As population and consumption grow, society has to put new land under the plough and to use all available areas, be they fertile or sterile. The limits of physical extent determine the monopoly and the two forms of ground rent.

Hard as this theory may seem to some, it is the crux of marxism and only those who have not digested it believe that the theory of imperialism was simply tacked on to marxism, a study made solely of competitive capitalism. The theory of ground rent contains all that is in the theory of modern imperialism, monopoly capitalism, the creator of “rents”. Even in largely manufacturing fields, one can thus say, like Lenin, that the capitalism of profit plus rents is parasitic.

Clearly the theory shows that nothing changes if this rent, whether it is based on traditional or very new sources, is handed over to the state, that is, the capitalist society organised as a power machine. This occurs so as to maintain its commodity, monetary and business basis. Before Marx, Ricardo proposed this, then Marx criticised it from the very beginning in a thorough and overall manner.

The lignite seams of Ribolla are among the least productive, while those of anthracite in Belgium are the most productive, and where there is no differential rent capitalism can never invest in more expensive installations to increase production and safeguard miners’ lives, unlike in the best mines in France, the Netherlands, England, Germany and America.

With today’s economy nor is it permitted to close those mines, which remain in the condition of the white horse that never sees the light of day and which communicates with a strange language of darkness with the two miners condemned with him by “bourgeois society” which Zola described in “Germinal”. Can Progress be held back by a lack of coal?

Now there is a super-national Coal Community<sup>[5]</sup>, like the iron and steel one, among the states which have nationalised the underground wealth in parallel with Italy. So, according to the fascist school, we have reached the outer bounds of ultramonopoly to fix on a scale of differential rent, low at Ribolla and Marcinelle, an absolute rent base. But this will certainly remain insufficient to buy new plant.

When the burnt out electrical wiring in the pits caused fire to break out, not only did the machinery and the bodies of the men burn, but also the coal of the precious, albeit poor, geological deposit. It burnt because the tunnels the men dug bring in oxygen from the air, which is why old tunnels are sealed off with concrete walls. Thus there was the technical alternative: send down oxygen for those who were dying and their foolhardy rescuers, or close it because every ton of oxygen consumes about half a ton of coal. The miners shouted at the specialised technicians brought from Germany: you haven’t come to save our workmates, but the mine! The solution, if the maddened shouts of the survivors had not been raised too high would have been simple: close all the entrances!

Without oxygen everything falls silent: the oxidation of coal and the analogous process in man, which we call life.

Besides, and it's not the revolutionary press which says so!, according to a very old tradition which is certainly even older that the capitalist social system, until the miner emerges, living or dead, from the terrible mouth of the mine, the system continues to pay his full wages, even triple time. The miner has to stay down only eight hours, so if he does not come up then, it is supposed that he is working another shift. When the corpse is pulled out and identified, the shift ends and the family will only receive a pension, less than the sum for single-time shift working. It is therefore important that the company (private, state or community) brings out the bodies all the same. It seems that this is the reason why the women shouted that the closed coffins on which were placed a few recognisable objects for identification did not allow them to see if they contained the remains of men or of the deposits.

Get all the survivors out, then close the entrance forever! Commodity society will never be able to say this, so it fogs the issue with enquiries, funeral masses, the bonds of fraternity in which one can discern only the fraternity of the chain gang, crocodile tears and promises of legislation and administration to attract others “without reserves” to ask to take their places in the funereal lift cages — hats off to technology! It is difficult to change the type of cultivation after a long period, and the theory of rent prohibits leaving the last, the most dangerous, mine closed. It is this theory which dictates to a slave and usurer society the maximum rhythm in the mad worldwide dance of the coal business, it being precisely the geological limits to its future horizon which, as they narrow, thrust it into the monopoly economy, into the massacre of the producer, into thieving from the consumer.

The detective story of Marcinelle touched the world's soul. For how many more eight hour shifts would the “missing” in the heart of the earth, like those yesterday at the bottom of the Atlantic, consume wealth from the civil bourgeois economy, which from every pulpit shouts its glorious thrust towards a greater well-being? When will one at last be able to take them off the wage ledger and, having prayed to God one last time, forget them?

## The Suez Canal

Blood did not flow, and it was clear from the very first that it would not flow for the third act of the bourgeois trilogy of the August Bank Holiday, which shaded with dark deeds the rosier of bourgeois festivities, the holiday, the vacation, the emptiness in the emptiness of this world of builders from operettas, of those who sweat over stealing from their neighbour.

We could never credit it that there is a single marxist who for one second saw in Nasser a new historical protagonist, and the world in consternation and turned upside down by a simple



gesture, by a bold discovery of the latest little caesar, or pharaoh, as the case may be? What a man! He cracked the whip over France, England and America with the skill of a genius: the nationalisation of the canal! All this done by changing the guard from King Farouk, who could only ship million dollar odalisques, to a simple colonel who could get into the knickers of Marianne and Albion.

The problem of Suez too can be understood if we take the colonel as, leaving off now with pseudo-sexual remarks, the asshole he is, by applying the theory of rent.

Suez was a still honourable, even glorious, operation of the young bourgeoisie, alongside those considered as epochal by the Communist Manifesto. Perhaps it was one of the last. When the encore was attempted at Panama, it swiftly collapsed into the filth of hyperscandal, and Old Europe laid down Lesseps's arms and those of his technicians after the first attempt.

Lesseps could have been a follower of Saint-Simon and the idea of the Suez Canal was accepted a century ago as a socialist one. He cheered the utopianists, but undoubtedly, as in the marxist conception, the enterprise of capitalism aimed at linking the world and its far-flung corners are to be considered as premises for its socialist transformation. The idea of a canal goes back to Napoleon I who had technical studies made, backed, according to some, by the philosopher and great mathematician Leibnitz. It is no chance event that Napoleon attempted his destruction of English maritime and imperial domination right there in Egypt. But even older civilisations had thought of the work: Senwosret, pharaoh of Egypt, even got round to performing it, and if Herodotus is correct, 120,000 workers died in the attempt made by another pharaoh. The Caliphs abandoned the idea, put off by the fear that they would open the way to the Byzantine fleet. After the discovery of the sea route to India in the fifteenth century, it was the Venetians' turn, those precursors of modern capitalism, but the Turks were opposed.

The work lasted from 1859 to 1868, employing mainly French and Ottoman capital, facing English hostility. The graveyards of the white and Arab workers were notorious — the English denounced the enlisting of thousands of impoverished fellahs as slavery and the case was decided by Napoleon III. The French engineers of the time, who were fighters and not just businessmen, freed of the army of navvies, then employed huge machines and undertook the task. The concession offered by the Egyptian government should have been for 99 years from the day the canal was opened. During this period, it should have received fifteen percent of the company's profits. It is not the place to repeat here the story of the business manoeuvres and international stock-jobbing by which the Viceroys of Egypt, subjects of the Sultan in Constantinople, were defrauded of their rights to a portion of the shares which passed by various means to British capital and government and, in fact, to the Royal Family.

Nevertheless it was a concession and the property of the whole works, several times enlarged and improved, should be passed to the Cairo government in 1968, without any payment.

One should be extremely wary of dealing with “right” in this struggle between buccaneers and sharks of the largest tonnage.

What is important are the economic concepts. The initial capital was 200 million French Gold Francs. This would now be worth 60 billion French Francs, or 100 billion Lira.

The present value of the shares, leaving aside their thirty per cent fall after Nasser’s decree, which nevertheless assured their prominence on the stock market, (one should then say on the day of the decree) the capital of the Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez is quoted at £70 million, or 90 billion French Francs. The valuations are not at the exchange rate: in US Dollars they are 200 million, for the former, and 250 million for the latter, and in Italian Lira 120 billion and 150 billion respectively, all in round figures.

Last year’s company takings were 35 billion French Francs with a profit of a good 16 billion: 45 per cent! In Lira about 55 and 25. But Nasser valued them at 100 million Dollars! 60 billion Lira net.

Such great fruitfulness cannot all be the profit of industrial capital, apart from its already declared amortisation, which seems to be covered by huge reserves formed by the company heads. It is not a productive concern. The ships of passage pay a toll of 300 to 600 Lira per ton dead-weight, but they do not take away anything saleable on the open market — payment for a service, not for goods. Obviously the maintenance, caretaking, management and administrative costs of the canal represent a very small part of the takings. The rest is rent. It is absolute in that it is derived from a monopoly which could close Suez or Port Said. It is, moreover, differential in that it represents the navigation costs via the worse route, the endless rounding of the Cape of Good Hope.

Who collects this rent? The “landlord” of the land through which the canal was cut, without the permission of whom one would not have been able to open the first excavations in 1859. This question of property becomes a question of sovereignty for Nasser. For us, this terminology is without meaning. For us marxists, rent goes to whoever makes a monopoly work. This is not even anti-juridical — in classical Roman law theory “the basis of ownership is occupation”. The same that, since the world began, is the source of political sovereignty.

By this standard, the English are silly and equally foolish is Nasser. The former kept garrison troops in the canal zone to defend it until a few years back. In fact, during the two world wars, German ships and those of her allies were not allowed to pass. London was about to close the door during the Italian-Ethiopian War and Mussolini had his finest moment — he blackmailed the English by demonstrating his willingness to attack the Mediterranean fleet. But one cannot be led to believe that those who play the fool can also make history — the candidate for the lunatic asylum, Nasser, stands many cubits shorter.

Could the English dream of withdrawing the garrison and keeping the rent? Could the French dream of as much?

Greater silliness lies on the Egyptian side who thought that sovereignty was their ace of spades, taking this in its metaphysical sense in which the sovereignty of a tiny country weighs the same as that of a giant.

Nasser had wagered on Russia, one of the giants. It is for this that we consider him a fool. The newspapers published on the eve of the London Conference that the Russians at their Twentieth Congress, in front of Shepilov, marvellous to behold in his coat and tails, had abandoned another of Stalin's mistaken theories, that of the international political predominance of large states over smaller ones<sup>[6]</sup>, and declared for the liberation of the latter from the function of subject, satellite or vassal states. Oh poor little states! This is not a theory created by Stalin, which Stalin can have the passing whim of abandoning, or that his will-readers can put out of the way! Nor can the little Cairo Colonel put a new theory in its place: the holy sovereignty of the statelets, even the pocket handkerchief ones. For (this is the biggest laugh) America is bound to accept a similar theory, and even puts forward itself, or Russia, as champion of the opposing principal: that of the big fish which eats the little one.

The fact and the historical law is that the big states carve up the world at their pleasure, with general war or with (God forbid it) peaceful coexistence between them (the big fish) and that the small states are like soft plasticine for world relief maps in their hands. They have dominated history for millennia, for two centuries of European history above all, and in a striking manner in the last two great wars, only the seating of some of the big fish changes: Japan and Germany, and new ones are put there, like China.

Nasser did not go to the conference. So be it. But London must have frightened him just because Russia sat there. Russia defends the same principal as the others: who gives a damn about sovereignty over the two banks of these world routes which are nodes in the international trade network? Since there ceased to be a single imperial dominator, as when Albion made its way (for us it is life as well as a way, the undeformed Mussolini replied) along the Mediterranean and all the Mediterraneans, the dominators have been the three or four big guns in turn, for whom Nasser counts less than a corporal. They, or whoever wins the next (twenty years off) third world war, will give Suez to him, without counting a red cent if little Egypt had fought with the winners or the losers.

Hitler, an expression of rather more serious forces, was urged by them to make a huge thrust as far as Crete. The aim and place were Suez — he came to understand (or someone did for him) that the goal was more Suez than Dunkirk, from which they held back. Big does not eat big. Happy little Nasser. Do not leave the rank of foodstuffs.

## To You, Old Mole!

These twenty years will pass and shall we little animal-men, we tricked and intoxicated consumers, we makers of increasingly unpleasant and useless efforts, let them pass seated in front of the radio or the screen to hear humbug and tittle-tattle from technicians, experts, specialists, managers, diplomats, politicians, scoundrels and adventurers, without having learnt anything, or forgetting more and more what the working class already well knew at the time the century of Suez began?

Good, very good, then that the isthmuses have been crossed with huge cuts (Suez remains the longest, if not the most complex, at 160 kilometres — twice Panama) and that the network of international links circles and circles again the mercantile world of convenient capitalism, like that of the retarius which immobilised the barbarian gladiator for the *coup de grace*. A missing proletariat now tears up the Internationals, but capital is condemned to rebuild them across oceans and continents. Well, very well, then that the great powers are very few and leave in blind impotence the small and numerous, wrapping them in the other inextricable, unslackening net of falsity, lies, fraud and philistine and bigoted obscurantism, under the false glitter which has become unsupportable for its stench, of technology, science, philanthropy and the drive towards well-being. Good, then that the centres of this school of superstition and corruption are ever decreasing in number and more easily seen from every corner of the world.

While they propagate their false beliefs of all their countries and religions; rereading to us with false puritanism and obscene blasphemy their bibles of Christ, Mammon and Demos, we too can repeat our classical verses and demonstrate that we have known since before the canal was cut that the result would have been a dizzying concentration of wealth and power, imperial totalitarianism, monopolistic oppression, the Party state, the holy alliance of the capitalist monsters, all the more reinforced by the world wars. Good, the dictatorship of Capital, of Militarism, of Business, of Fascism, is blessed endlessly by priests of every denomination. Let us open our bible:

“But the revolution is thorough. It is still journeying through purgatory. It does its work methodically. (...) it had completed one half of its preparatory work; it is now completing the other half. First it perfected the parliamentary power, in order to be able to overthrow it. Now it has attained this, it perfects the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it. And when it has done this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from its seat and exultantly exclaim: Well burrowed, old mole.”[\[7\]](#)

With the historical radar of Marx's theories, on whose screen observers who have not swallowed the alcohol of the intoxicating bourgeois ideology cannot read lies, in the fog of the

depths off Nantacket, in the dark of the walled tomb of the living in Marcinelle, in the bitterness of the slime of the stagnant ponds of the Arabian Desert, while the forces of the Revolution seem to be hiding and Great Capital carouses in the bright sunlight, we have again found, at his inexhaustible work, the Old Mole who undermines the curse of the infamous social forms, who prepares for the not near, but most certain, destructive explosion.

## Footnotes

[1] Erroneously given as 1906 in the text.

[2] Both have since been retired. The former is now a University, the latter was destroyed by fire.

[3] i.e. Togliatti

[4] Cf. *il programma comunista* nos. 21-3, 1953 and 1-12, 1954. The series is republished as “Mai la merce sfamera l'uomo” (Milan, 1979). In this volume see pp. 259-61 as regards Ribolla.

[5] i.e. The European Coal and Steel Community.

[6] Reference to the Russian Foreign Minister at the conference to settle the Suez affair, The Twentieth Party Congress was in February 1956. The Suez affair was finally settled in Rome in 1958 with payment of compensation.

[7] “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon” in Marx Engels Collected Works Vol. XI, Moscow, 1979, p. 185.

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**Bordiga Archive**

Amadeo Bordiga 1960

# Auschwitz, or the Great Alibi

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**Source:** Programme Communiste, no. 11;

**Translated:** by [Mitchell Abidor](#);

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**Translator's note:** If all there was to this article was its mechanistic reduction of Marxism, its denial of human agency in the most horrific of acts, its diminution of the person to a mere conduit for class interests, "Auschwitz, or the Great Alibi" would be merely another betrayal of the richness of Marx's thought. When we add its callous and cold treatment of the Holocaust as a simple "ejection from the productive process" of millions of humans, its foreshadowing of Jean-Marie Le Pen's dismissal of the event as a "point of detail" of the Second World War, it attains to odium. And finally, when we take into account its posterity, its use as a basis for the small current of the (primarily French) left that indulged in Holocaust denial, its true horror is laid bare.

This article has a slightly controversial history, having never been published under Bordiga's name. It originally appeared, though, in 1960 in a French Bordigist journal, Programme Communiste, and Bordiga himself never spoke out against its theses. And so, echoing the ancients, we will call the author the pseudo-Bordiga.

The article was published as a pamphlet in 1970 by Pierre Guillaume, former member of Bordiga's Parti Communist International and of the group around the ultra-left bookstore "La Vieille Taupe." In a later incarnation La Vieille Taupe was to become the voice of left-wing holocaust denial, and it is in Guillaume's early affection for this article – which appears on the web not only at marxists.org, but on revisionist websites – that we can see the germ of the movement.

Indeed, it is an easy step from "Auschwitz or the Great Alibi" to complete denial of the Holocaust.

The author places Nazis and anti-fascists on the same level, dismissing both for blaming "hatred of the Jews" as the cause for the Holocaust. Anti-Semitism was not the "a priori reason for the destruction" of the Jews; it was nothing but the "expression of [a] desire to limit and concentrate destruction on them." Their choice as victims was due both to their place in capitalist society and their ease of "identification." Anti-Semitism is thus nothing but a side issue, one incidental to the discussion. After all, they weren't killed "because they were Jews, but because they were ejected from the production process." Two decades of Hitlerite anti-Semitic rants meant nothing. "Der Stürmer" meant nothing. Kristallnacht meant nothing. All we had was capitalism looking for a way out of a crisis.

From there the author shifts to placing a part of the blame for the death of millions on the West, which didn't take in the Jews, and his tone makes it clear that it is the greater part of the blame. Stating that "most remained [in Germany], despite themselves and despite the Nazis," the Reich becomes just an ancillary figure in the drama. Not only did they want to send the Jews elsewhere and not be forced to kill them, it was the West that refused to save them. In one of "The Great Alibi's" most outrageous enormities, it is the SS that "believed in Western ideals." In pseudo-Bordiga's treatment of the negotiations between Joel Brand and Eichmann for the trading of Jews for trucks, it is Eichman and the Germans who are allowed to appear concerned about the Jews, even putting down a "deposit" of Jews in Switzerland preparatory to the final swap.

And then the pseudo-Bordiga sets loose the final indignity: “German capitalism resigned itself with difficulty to murder pure and simple.” Its hand was apparently forced in the killing of six million Jewish men, women and children. One can almost hear Himmler sighing sadly through pseudo-Bordiga’s prose. And of course, in the Bordigist universe, it was “capitalism” that killed them, not the specific form, German Nazism, and their death wasn’t by Zyklon B or disease or firing squads; it was done by “ejecting them from production.”

The ignominy of this article never ends: the “imperialists” are guilty of using the deaths of the Jews to “justify...the despicable treatment inflicted on the German people.” In this pseudo-Bordiga is perfectly consistent. No German was responsible for any of the crimes perpetrated; capitalism alone, an abstract entity, was responsible for everything. And in any event, in the final paragraph we are informed that capitalist life is everywhere and in every way a hell. A precise equivalence exists between daily life under capitalism and the death camps, since if the “good democratic anti-fascists... show the lampshades made of human skin, it’s to make us forget that capitalism transforms the living man into a lampshade.” “Shame” seems to have been a word missing from the author’s vocabulary.

The death camps are rendered banal, the Germans are exculpated, the fate of the Jews demoted to mere happenstance. Denial of the very existence of the Shoah flows naturally from all of this.

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The left wing press has once again just demonstrated that racism, and primarily anti-Semitism, constitutes the great alibi of anti-fascism. It is its preferred banner and at the same time its final refuge in the discussion. Who can resist the evoking of the extermination camps and the crematory ovens? Who doesn’t bow before the six million murdered Jews? Who doesn’t shudder before the sadism of the Nazis? And yet, this is one of the most scandalous mystifications of anti-fascism, and we are duty bound to demonstrate it.

A recent poster of the M.R.A.P.<sup>[1]</sup> attributes the responsibility for the deaths of 50 million people, of which 6 million were Jews, to Nazism. This position, identical to that of the “fascism as war monger” of the so-called communists, is a typically bourgeois position. Refusing to see in capitalism itself the cause of the crises and cataclysms that periodically ravage the world, the bourgeois and reformist ideologues have always pretended to explain them by the wickedness of this one or that one. We see here the fundamental identity of the fascist and anti-fascist ideologies, if we can call them such. Both of them proclaim that it is the thoughts, the ideas, the will of human groups that determine social phenomena. Against these ideologies, which we call bourgeois because they are ideologies for the defense of capitalism, against these past, present and future idealists, Marxism has demonstrated that, on the contrary, it is social relations that determine ideological movements.

This is the basis of Marxism, and in order to realize to what extent our so-called Marxists have rejected it it suffices to see that among them everything has passed over to the realm of the idea: colonialism, imperialism, capitalism itself are no longer anything but mental states. And suddenly all the ills which humanity suffers from are due to makers of evils: makers of poverty, of oppression, of war, etc...

Marxism has demonstrated that, on the contrary, poverty, oppression, war and destruction, far from being anomalies due to deliberate and maleficent wills are part of the “normal” functioning of capitalism. This particularly applies to wars of the imperialist era. This is a point which we will develop at greater length, due to the importance it represents for the subject at hand, that of destruction.

Even when our bourgeois and reformists recognize that imperialist wars are due to conflicts of interest they remain far from an understanding of capitalism. We see this in their lack of understanding of the meaning of destruction. For them the goal of war is victory, and the destruction of enemy men and installations are only means for achieving this goal. To such an extent that there are innocents who foresee wars made by means of sleeping pills. We have demonstrated that, on the contrary, destruction is the principal goal of war. The imperialist rivalries that are the immediate cause of wars are themselves nothing but the consequence of ever increasing over-production. Capitalist production is in fact forced to grow because of the fall in the profit level, and crises are born of the need to ceaselessly expand production along with the impossibility of selling goods. War is the capitalist solution to the crisis. The massive destruction of installations, of the means of production and of goods allows production to start up again, and the massive destruction of men cures the periodic “over-population” which goes hand in hand with over-production. One must be a petit bourgeois crackpot to believe that imperialist conflicts could be settled by a game of *belote* or around a round table, and that this enormous destruction and the deaths of tens of millions of men are only due to the stubbornness of some, the wickedness of others, and the cupidity of yet others still.

In 1844 Marx already attacked bourgeois economists for considering cupidity innate instead of explaining it, and showed why the greedy were forced to be greedy. Marxism also has demonstrated the causes of “over-population” since 1844. “The demand for men necessarily regulates the production of men, alike any other merchandise. If the supply is greater than the demand a portion of the workers fall into beggary or dies of hunger,” Marx wrote. Engels wrote: “There is only over-population where there is an excess of productive forces in general, and [we have seen] that private property has made man a merchandise whose production and destruction depend only on demand, and that competition has slaughtered and every day slaughters in this way millions of men.”<sup>[2]</sup> The last imperialist war, far from proving Marxism wrong and justifying its “renewal,” confirmed the correctness of its explanations.

It was necessary to recall these points before dealing with the extermination of the Jews. This occurred, in fact, not at a random moment, but in the middle of a crisis and an imperialist war. It is thus from within this gigantic enterprise of destruction that it must be explained. With this in mind the problem is clarified. We no longer have to explain the “destructive nihilism” of the Nazis, but rather why the destruction was in part concentrated on the Jews. On this point as well Nazis and anti-fascists are in agreement: it was racism, the hatred of Jews, a “passion,” free and



ferocious that caused the death of the Jews. But we Marxists know that there are no free social passions, that nothing is more determined than these great movements of collective hatred. We will see that the study of the anti-Semitism of the imperialist era only illustrates this truth.

It is not by chance that we say “anti-Semitism of the imperialist era,” for if the idealists of all stripes, from Nazis to “Jewish” theoreticians consider that the hatred of the Jew is the same in all times and places, we know that this is not so. The anti-Semitism of the current period is totally different from that of the feudal period.<sup>[3]</sup> We can’t go into the history of the Jews in depth here, which Marxism has completely explained. We know why feudal society maintained Jews as such. We know that if the strong bourgeoisies, those that were able to make their political revolutions early (England, the United States, France) have almost completely assimilated their Jews, the weak bourgeoisies were not able to do so. We won’t explain here the survival of the “Jews,” but rather the anti-Semitism of the imperialist period. And it won’t be difficult to explain if, instead of examining the nature of Jews or anti-Semites, we consider their place in society.

Due to their earlier history, the Jews find themselves essentially in the middle and petite bourgeoisie. But that class is condemned by the irresistible advance of the concentration of capital. It is this that explains that it is the source of anti-Semitism, which, as Engels said, “is nothing but a reaction of feudal social strata doomed to disappear, against modern society, which is essentially composed of capitalists and wage earners. It thus only serves reactionary objectives under a false veil of socialism.”

Germany between the wars demonstrates this situation at a particularly acute phase. Shaken by the war, the revolutionary advance of 1918-28, ever threatened by the struggle of the proletariat, German capitalism was deeply affected by the worldwide post-war crisis. While the stronger victorious bourgeoisies (the US, Great Britain, France) were relatively untouched and easily overcame the crisis of “re-adaptation to peacetime economy,” German capitalism fell into complete stagnation. And it was perhaps the petite and medium bourgeoisies who suffered the most, as in all crises that lead to the proletarianization of the middle classes and the increased concentration of capital through the elimination of a portion of small and medium-sized enterprises. But here the situation was such that the ruined, bankrupt, seized, liquidated petite bourgeois couldn’t even fall into the proletariat, which was itself seriously affected by unemployment (seven million unemployed at the worst of the crisis): they fell directly into a state of beggary, condemned to starve to death as soon as their reserves were exhausted. It was in reaction to this terrible threat that the petite bourgeoisie invented anti-Semitism. Not so much, as the metaphysicians say, to explain the misfortunes that struck them as to attempt to save themselves by concentrating it on one group. The petite bourgeoisie reacted by sacrificing one of its parts to the horrible economic pressure, to the threat of diffuse destruction that rendered uncertain the existence of each of its members, hoping in this way to save and ensure the

existence of the others. Anti-Semitism comes no more from a “Machiavellian plan” that it does from “wicked ideas.” It directly results from economic constraints. The hatred of the Jews, far from being the *a priori* reason for their destruction was only the expression of this desire to limit and concentrate destruction on them.

It sometimes happens that the workers themselves give themselves over to racism. This happens when, threatened with massive unemployment, they attempt to concentrate it on certain groups: Italians, Poles or other “filthy foreigners,” “dirty Arabs,” “niggers,” etc. But in the proletariat these impulses only occur at the worst moments of demoralization, and don’t last. As soon as he enters into struggle the proletariat clearly and concretely sees its enemy: it is a homogeneous class with an historical perspective and mission.

On the contrary, the petite bourgeois is a class condemned. At the same time it is also condemned to be unable to understand anything, to be incapable of fighting: it can do nothing but blindly flail about in the vice that crushes it. Racism is not an aberration of the spirit: it is and will be the petite bourgeois reaction to the pressures of big capital. The choice of a “race,” that is of the group upon whom the destruction will be concentrated, obviously depends on the circumstances. In Germany the Jews fulfilled the “required conditions” and were the only ones to fulfill them: they were almost exclusively petite bourgeois, and in this petite bourgeoisie the sole group that was sufficiently identifiable. It was only onto them that the petite bourgeoisie could channel the catastrophe.

It was in fact necessary that identification present no difficulty; they had to be able to precisely define who would be destroyed and who would be spared. From this flows the counting up of baptized grandparents which, in flagrant contradiction with the theories of race and blood, would suffice to demonstrate their incoherence. But logic had nothing to do with it. The democrat who contents himself with demonstrating the absurdity and ignominy of racism, as usual misses the point.

Harassed by capital, the Germany petite bourgeoisie thus threw the Jews to the wolves in order to lighten its sled and save itself. Not, of course, consciously, but this was the meaning of its hatred of the Jews and the satisfaction it got from the closing and pillaging of Jewish stores. We can say that for its part big capital was happy with the gift: it could liquidate a portion of the petite bourgeoisies with the agreement of the petite bourgeoisie. Even better, it was the petite bourgeoisie itself that saw to this liquidation. But this “personalized” way of presenting capital gives a poor picture of the situation: capitalism knows no more than the petite bourgeoisie what it is doing. It is under the influence of immediate economic constraints and passively follows the path of least resistance.

We haven’t spoken of the German proletariat. This is because it didn’t directly enter into the affair. It had been defeated and, of course, the liquidation of the Jews could only be realized

after its defeat. But the social forces that led to this liquidation existed before the defeat of the proletariat. It only permitted this to be carried by leaving capitalism's hands free.

And it was then that the economic liquidation of the Jews began: expropriation in all forms, exclusion from the liberal professions, civil service, etc. Little by little the Jews were deprived of any means of existence; they lived on the reserves they were able to save. During this entire period, which lasted until the eve of the war, Nazi policy towards the Jews was contained in two words: *Juden 'raus!* Jews out! They sought by every means to favor the emigration of the Jews. But if the Nazis only wanted to rid themselves of the Jews, who they didn't know what to do with, and if the Jews for their part asked for nothing more than to leave Germany, no one anywhere else wanted to allow them to enter. And there is nothing surprising in this, since no one *could* allow them to enter. There was no country capable of absorbing and allowing to live a few million ruined petite bourgeois. Only a small portion of the Jews was able to leave. Most remained, *despite themselves and despite the Nazis*. Suspended in mid-air, in a way.

The imperialist war aggravated the situation both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively because German capitalism, forced to reduce the petite bourgeoisie in order to concentrate European capital in its hands, extended the liquidation of the Jews to all of Central Europe. Anti-Semitism had already shown what it could do; it only had to carry on. This, incidentally, was in accord with the anti-Semitism indigenous to Central Europe, though the latter was more complex (a horrible mix of feudal and petit bourgeois anti-Semitism, an analysis of which we can't enter into here).

At the same time the situation was aggravated qualitatively. Living conditions were made more difficult by the war, the reserves of the Jews melted away and they were condemned to shortly die of starvation.

In "normal" times, and when it's a matter of a small number, capitalism can allow those it ejects from the productive process to die on their own. But it was impossible for it to do this in the middle of the war and for millions of men. Such "disorder" would have paralyzed everything. Capitalism had to *organize* their death.

And it didn't kill them immediately. To begin with, it removed them from circulation; it gathered them together, concentrated them. And it made them work while under-nourishing them, i.e., in super-exploiting them to death. Killing a man at work is an old method of capital's. Marx wrote in 1844: "To be led with success, the industrial struggle demands large armies they can concentrate at one point and decimate copiously." These men had to meet their living costs as long as they were alive, and then those of their death. And they had to produce surplus value as long as they're capable of it. For capitalism doesn't execute the men it has condemned unless it profits by that very putting to death.

But man is tough. Even reduced to a skeletal state they didn't die fast enough. They had to

massacre those who could no longer work, then those they no longer needed because the mishaps of war rendered their labor force unusable.

German capitalism resigned itself with difficulty to murder pure and simple. Not, of course, through humanitarianism, but because it wasn't profitable. It was thus that Joel Brand's mission was born, which we will speak of because it sheds light on world capitalism's responsibility [\[4\]](#). Joel Brand was the leader of a semi-clandestine organization of Hungarian Jews. That organization sought to save Jews using all methods: hideouts, clandestine emigration, and corruption of the SS. The SS of the *Judenkommando* tolerated these organizations, which they more or less tried to use as "auxiliaries" for roundup and selection operations.

In April 1944 Joel Brand was called to the *Judenkommando* of Budapest to meet Eichmann, who was head of the Jewish section of the SS. Eichmann, with Himmler's agreement, charged him with the following mission: go to see the Anglo-Americans to negotiate the sale of a million Jews. The SS demanded in exchange 10,000 trucks, but were prepared to bargain, both as to the nature and the quantity of the merchandise. In addition, they proposed the delivery of 100,000 Jews as soon as the agreement was received as a sign of good faith. The affair was taken very seriously.

We can't go into detail concerning Joel Brand's misadventures. He left for Turkey and struggled with the English prisons of the Middle East. The Allies refused to take the affair seriously, did everything possible to stifle and discredit it. Finally, Joel Brand met Lord Moyne, British Minister of State for the Middle East, in Cairo. He begged him to at least obtain a written agreement, even if it wasn't to be honored: this would mean at least 100,000 lives would be saved.

"And what will the final number be?"

"Eichman spoke of a million."

"How could you imagine such a thing, Mr. Brand? What would I do with a million Jews? Where would I put them? Who would accept them?"

"If there is no room for us on earth, all that is left to us is to allow ourselves to be exterminated," [\[5\]](#) Brand said in despair.

The SS were slower to understand. *They* believed in Western ideals. After the failure of Joel Brand's mission, and in the midst of the exterminations, they again tried to sell Jews to the Joint [\[6\]](#), placing a "deposit" of 1700 Jews in Switzerland. But aside from them, no one else wanted to conclude the affair.

For his part, Joel Brand had understood, or almost. He had understood what the situation was,

but not why it was so. It wasn't the earth that had run out of room, but *capitalist society*. And not because they were *Jews*, but, because they were ejected by the production process, were useless to production.

Lord Moyne was assassinated by two Jewish terrorists, and J. Brand later learned that he had often sympathized with the tragic fate of the Jews. "His policy was dictated by the inhuman administration in London." But Brand hadn't understood that that administration is nothing but the administration of capital and that *it is capital that is inhuman*. And capital didn't know what to do with these people. It didn't even know what to do with the rare survivors, those "displaced person" who no one knew how to place.

The surviving Jews finally succeeded in making a place for themselves. By force and profiting from the international conjuncture, the State of Israel was formed. But even this was only possible by "displacing" other populations. Hundred of thousands of Arab refugees drag out their worthless (to capital) existences in refugee camps.

We have seen how capitalism condemned millions of men to death by ejecting them from production. We have seen how it massacred them while extracting the maximum surplus value possible. It remains for us to see how it exploits them after their very death.

It was the imperialists of the allied camp who first used them to justify their war and to justify after their victory the despicable treatment inflicted on the German people. How they threw themselves on the camps and the corpses, showing off the horrible photos and proclaiming: "Look at what bastards these krauts are! How right we were to fight them. How right we now are to give them a taste of their own medicine." When we think of the countless crimes of imperialism; when we think, for example, that at the very moment (1945) when our Thorez sung of their victory over fascism, 45,000 Algerians (fascist provocateurs) fell under the blows of repression. When we think that it is international capitalism which is responsible for the massacres, the ignoble cynicism of this hypocritical satisfaction is enough to make you sick.

At that same time all our good democratic anti-fascists threw themselves on the corpses of the Jews. And since that time they wave them under the nose of the proletariat. In order to make them feel capitalism's infamy? No, on the contrary. It's to make it appreciate, in contrast, the *true* democracy, the *true* progress, the *well being* it enjoys in capitalist society. The horrors of capitalist death must make the proletariat forget the horrors of capitalist life and the fact that the two are indissolubly connected. The experiments of the SS doctors must make them forget that capitalism experiments on a large scale with carcinogenic products, on the effects of alcoholism on heredity, the radioactivity of "democratic" bombs. If they show lampshades made of human skin it's to make us forget that capitalism transforms the *living man* into a lampshade. The mountains of hair, the teeth of gold, the bodies of men turned into merchandise must make us forget that capitalism made a merchandise of living man. It is labor, *man's very life*, that

capitalism has transformed into merchandise. This is the source of all evils. Using the corpses of the victims of capital to try to hide the reality, to have the corpses serve as protection for capital, is the most despicable way of using them to the ultimate degree.

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## Notes

1. Mouvement contre le Racisme, l'Antisemitisme, et pour la Paix.
  2. Quotations are from the Manuscripts of 1844.
  3. Commerce, and especially commerce using money, was foreign to the fundamental schema of feudal society and was rejected onto people outside of that society, generally Jews. The ostracism they suffered from bespoke feudalism's attempt to maintain these activities which it could already not do without on the margins of society. But commerce and usury were the primary forms of capital. The hatred of the Jews expressed in a mystified and inadequate fashion the resistance that the classes of feudal society, from the peasant to the minor nobility, as well as the guild artisan and the clergy, opposed to the irresistible development of the mercantilism that dissolved their social order. Even once productive capitalism and large-scale industry began their growth petite bourgeois "popular" tradition often continued to identify the Jew with Capital.
  4. see *L'Histoire de Joel Brand* by Alex Weissberg.
  5. See above.
  6. Joint Jewish Committee, an American Jewish organization.
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Amadeo Bordiga 1963

# The Legend of the Piave

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**Source:** <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/3909/bordiga0.html>;

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The patriotic saga of Italy raised the Piave to the status of the national river, and designated it as such, in 1917. In the war which was to have been the Fourth War of Independence, leading the country in a leap beyond the Venetian frontiers (won by no means by armed might) already gained from the Third. After two years of an immobile front on the Isonzo, streaming blood from a dozen battles, the direction then changed with the famous defeat at, and flight from, Caporetto, with the Austrians flooding onto the plain through this breach. After a few days of fearing for the worst when it was believed that they would only have been stopped on the Adige or Mincio, on the 1859-66 frontiers, the tide was stemmed on the Piave, something that was foreseen by the not altogether stupid titch of a Ring who organised the defence.<sup>[1]</sup> We all then learnt that the Piave was to be declined as a masculine, not as a feminine substantive, laying to rest our schoolboy doubts.<sup>[2]</sup>

The river's name entered popular poetry and legend. The old Neapolitan versifier E.A. Mario, recently passed on, wrote verses and music which lost only by a short head to Mameli's hymn in the competition for the national anthem. Can you recall the ingenuous phraseology? "Together with the infantry, battled the waves". Once again a river was personified in literature, like in classical literature, as defending the motherland, carrying to the sea piles of enemy corpses. "The Piave whispered: the foreigner shall not pass".

But now the Piave has carried out to sea thousands of Italian corpses struck down by the apocalyptic flood from the Vajont during the dark night of October 9-10th, and has lost its title to nobility. Its legend was and is one of death, and there is no more glory in carrying away the bodies of soldiers than of peaceful citizens caught in their sleep. Then they were immolated to the never satiated with blood numina of war, now to those of modern bourgeois and patriotic capitalist civilisation and above all to the adorers of its science and technology.

It is not just today that we suddenly desire to dishonour, along with those of wars between peoples, the no less infamous killer deities of a civilisation which rusts and rots year by year.

In Prometeo, 2nd series no. 4, July-September 1952 we dedicated the article Politics and

Construction to this theme which, among the various examples of deadly disasters which constitute real bankruptcies of scientific technique, recalled several cases of floods and cited historical cases of mountain reservoir dams, recalling the history of this skill from the Moors in Spain and Leonardo to the organisational inadequacies of the modern hydraulic services in the period of great capital and monstrous construction enterprises.

In France in 1959 there was the terrible Frejus catastrophe which, nevertheless, despite the collapse of the dam which did not happen in the case of the Vajont basin, caused fewer victims than the recent Italian catastrophe.

Then we found the person responsible, the accused to be stood in the dock, but not in the manner of the reckless pettifogging political prick of demagogic opportunism: it was Progress, the lying myth which makes the poor in spirit and the starved wretches bend their backs to it, ready to swear loyalty to this Moloch which every so often and a little bit each day crushes them under the wheels of its obscene carriage.

In the inhuman system of capital, every technical problem boils down to an economic one, that of the prize to be won by cutting costs and boosting returns. The old pre-bourgeois societies had some residual time to think about safety and general interests. As we recalled in the case of the Frejus dam, that too was a masterpiece of brand new technology, it was light, slim and agile and so with a very modest concrete and steel tonnage held back an enormous volume of water. But already past-builders had realized that dams work by gravity, that is, they resisted the incredible thrust of the liquid in that they were extremely heavy and so did not collapse. We recalled that after several disasters in Spain and at Gleno in Italy (1923) the theory was modified to take account of the hydraulic thrust below, at the base of the dam and these were broadened and made more stable. But the recent dams have obeyed (a mercenary science has obeyed) the sacrosanct need for low costs, so they are built, as with the Frejus and Vajont, in an arch, that is, with a curve that points out into the water pressure and spreads the load onto the shoulders wedged into the valley sides. The dam thus becomes less voluminous, less heavy and less costly and is made of highly resistant materials. But then the pressure of the thrust on the two shoulders of the construction grows massively because this depends on the water pressure borne on its back, which is all the more massive the higher the dam is. Allowing for superlative materials permitting the slimming of the dam and therefore of its shoulders, the pressure on the natural rock is immense and the problem ceases to be the, controllable, one of adjusting the arch of reinforced concrete to take the thrust (this cannot be reduced), but of seeing if the rocky sides will crumble, ruining the arch shaped dam. This was the error made at Frejus. Then too it was not the mechanical and hydraulic engineers who were wrong, but — it is said — the geologists called on to evaluate the strength of the rock.

The first problem can best be tackled by mathematical calculations, performed either by a good theoretician or by a computer, while the great theoretician sitting at it goes through a few



packets of cigarettes. It can be tested on a suitable scale model in the laboratory.

The geological problem is not one for the smoking saloon or the test tank. It is one of lengthy human experience based on the proofs of historical building. Human and social experience. For all modern engineering, in so far as it makes things which are not pocket sized or cars, constructing things fixed to the Earth's crust, the key problem is the land/building relationship (for a simple house, the foundations). There are no perennially valid formulae but instead many skilful applications to choose from after gaining hard-learned experience. Taking a big salary and smoking in front of the computer is not sufficient.

This experience ripens over the centuries: whoever believes in progress and in the jest that last season's latest discovery contains the wisdom of all time, may get a big salary, but causes disasters, statistics for which, and they alone, show progress.

The very folk traditions among the uneducated masses, the place names themselves can help the geological expert (if it really was his fault) or, rather, the good engineer. Why ever was the Frejus narrows called *Mal Passet*: a bad step indeed.<sup>[3]</sup> The mountain overlooking the reservoir and which slid into it causing the terrible overflowing, why was it called *Monte Toc*? Toc, in Venetian, means piece: it was a rock that split off in pieces and all the inhabitants of the valley expected the landslide. *Vajont*, the name of the reservoir, but previously of the pass, the gorge in which the dam was wedged, all 263 meters (world-beating historical record!), in Ladino Friulian dialect equals the Venetian *va zo*, goes down, which collapses into the valley. In fact past landslides have been mentioned, by the poor inhabitants living on them.

Uortami, the geologist, in denying indignantly that he would ever have consented to the selection made for the dam site, stated that the choice fell to the engineers. Quite so. The philosophy of the two tragedies of Malpasset and Vajont (among the many others) is identical. At the bottom of these reckless projects, dictated and imposed by the hunger for profit, by an economic law to which all the navvies, the surveyor and chief engineer must all bow, for which reason it is a foolish remedy to uncover the guilty party at an inquest, lies the most idiotic of modern cults, the cult of specialisation. Not only is it inhuman to hunt down the scapegoat, but also vain, since one has allowed this stupid productive society to arise, made of separate sections. No one is guilty because, if someone takes off the blindfold for a moment, he can say that he gave advice requested by the next section, that he was the expert, the specialist, the competent person.

The science and skill of producing, and especially of building, will, in the future society which will kill the monster of economic return, of surplus-value production, be unitary and indivisible. Not a man's head, but a social brain above ridiculous separated sections will see without those useful blindfolds the immensity of each problem.

We read the report of the engineer who for thirty years had dreamt of building the Vajont

dam. The good man is dead and does not need our defence. He was interested by the purely morphological fact that with a little dam one could hold back a lot of water and nowhere else would the return be so great at so little cost. A victim of inexorable determinism.

Engineer Semenza, in his comment, is surprised by the fact that one could have foreseen taking thirty years to develop his basic idea now that the dam is complete. He did not think that the long time required could be due to doubts over the correctness of the choice made. He thought that the work had been well divided into sections protected by the right of not knowing nor wanting to check one another's conclusions. In this illusion, which is not blameworthy nor even a crime of "commission" or of "omission", lies the omnipotence, stronger than all and even the best engineer, of the modern capitalist superstition of the division of labour, which Marx first condemned and only the revolution will kill. The innocence of the designer is found in these words: "Hundreds, thousands of people, scientists, engineers, workers of all trades, worked to complete this dam which should have closed *the deep and narrow ravine of the Vajont stream*. Vajont gorge<sup>[4]</sup> as some guides call it, since *by nature it is so inaccessible and inhospitable*". No one today would think that the tour guide was right because he made money taking people up to see the narrow gorge and not by working on the dam. "Among the first were the hydrologists" who take rainfall and stream regime measurements, allowing one "to find the volume of water that would be held in the dam's reservoir". "Higher up the geologist examines the rock characteristics in detail, helped by the most modern (oh come on now!) geophysical research." "Meanwhile, the topographer measures with microscopic precision (fashionable jargon!) the valley's configuration so as to draw in the contour lines perfectly."

Let us leave out the details of the design work or works, the ninety hours of computer time that saved years of work by a team of mathematicians, the tales of the experiments on wood and then concrete models... Only one passage interests us, the reference to the ineluctable economic determinism. "The design selected from among many others, dating from 1956, *fully exploits the valley's characteristics which seem to have been made for the purpose of building an exceptionally large dam*".

The valley was made to be exploited, and if that had not been the case ... one would have had to have invented it.

With science, technology and labour, does man exploit nature? No, not at all, and the intelligent relationship between man and nature will arise when one stops making cost and design calculations in money, but in physical and human quantities.

One can say exploiting when a human group exploits another. The exploited collaborated with the exploiting enterprise in the grandiose constructions of the mercantile period. Many people were employed at Longarone and money was thrown around. The engineer has to answer: did it rain gold? It is true that a skilled worker struck over the evident danger of landslides, but it is

also a bitter lesson that the worker who was kicked out by the cursed surveyor because he was lame and would not have been able to escape in case of danger reacted in a violent manner. When the pay is good, risks to human life are normal fare for the society of money and wages.

The whole valley ran the risk, and now it is dead. The solution to this problem will never be found by the “democratic” method used by the currently available communists.

They are silly solutions to these tragedies — which only show that bourgeois, money, private initiative, market society has lived out its historical span and has by now become an even more putrescent corpse than the ones it flung into the Piave — the ones bandied about by newspapers fed on a gutless petty-bourgeois ideology, which perhaps a hundred years ago could get by, and which claims justice, honesty and sentences for those who get it wrong or cheat.

Socially and politically we stand apart from those who ask, in the name of the dead who risked their lives so that this iniquitous society could give them the only civilisation it could, for three laughable enquiries:

*The Ministerial Enquiry*, called for by the ministers who have their fingers in the pie and delegated to university professors loyal to the system of sectorial responsibility with which one has the right not to know “others’ subjects” in this bureaucratic, scholastic and career-ridden system which is drowning us.

*The Parliamentary Enquiry* in which a group of people with no knowledge and of contrasting ideologies (save that of the greed for political success and ambition, which is the same from the extreme right to the extreme left) study what they do not understand and then have a vote on it in the assembly of “politicians”, that is, those who should be the first to be tipped into the dustbin so as to liberate human society.

*The judiciary*, which knows that its job is to apply a code rooted in tradition and the latest constitution, useful for the petty thief and for the civil servant who in this case was the only one to be banged up for making public a “stolen” document which showed that the technical doubt over the dam was founded and long standing.

Three degrees of tricking, not the dead, but the living that look to the horrible parties and newspapers of all persuasions and drown in the unconsciousness of their destinies.

What is to be done with the dam? Another problem that the bureaucratic, democratic administrative mechanism will be unable to solve.

The dam was not flattened so Engineer Semenza, if he were still alive, would be innocent, looking at it from his sector’s point of view.

But the problem was the stability of the valley sides after they suddenly received a hydraulic

pressure of 26 atmospheres.

There was no alluvium at the bottom? What kind of excuse is that? The liquid flowed fast through the gap and thus did not deposit but eroded, creating over the centuries the conditions the topographers described to poor Semenza. Thus the side was friable[5], certainly permeable, and, underneath, the massive pressure on the strata that could yield caused Toc to slide.

The reservoirs created upstream from the dam, which could have provided an empirical test result, were put in place without being tested and without the order of the omnipotent state.

The dam was too high. The law on this matter must be amended to state a legal maximum, let us say under 100 metres. But then the return on the operation would fall below the costs. Horror! The monopoly would not lose out, but only the consumption pattern of those who depend on it, the same being the case if the state were to act directly.

Reformism, not only in Italy, flies this flag: the law passed, find the loophole.

An old engineer who could understand geology, topography and building mechanics since he had an old-fashioned degree said that the dam could collapse now. Behind it there is no longer water, but a mixed deposit of water and earth (mud and slime) which, with its higher specific weight, could exercise a greater thrust. Here there are no models that hold good! The case is too indeterminate and even the computers come up with nothing.

The Vajont basin was cut in two by the huge landslide with a volume higher than that of the water that it contained, a hill standing 100 metres above the water level.

But the smaller lake remaining next to the dam can generate the pressure indicated by the aforementioned engineer. It all depends on the height, that is the total, and the density of the mud which will be decanted.

The basin must be emptied, but not by blasting the dam with cannon-fire, but instead by installing syphons over it to replace the devices destroyed by the disaster and abandoning the potential energy which the turbine, if working, could have exploited.

We cannot believe that the Ministry of Public Works could have thought that the wall would remain in place to support something the size of an Alpine lake.

That sewer of death is no Alpine lake. The lakes formed during the glaciation between very deep indestructible rock walls and with a modest dam of natural morainic[6] hills. They have been tested by Mother Nature over millions of years, not by a Technical Commission!

Man certainly will win against nature. And will do so thanks to a science, a technology, an administration that will not be rented out to anyone.

Before bending nature to our ends, we will have had to have bent the sinister social forces which enslave us more than millions of cubic meters of grave stones and which condemn the replies of today's experts to great rewards and grasping profits. We must dam the floods not of water and earth, but of filthy lucre.

## Footnotes

[1] In 1917, the Italian army was forced back to the Piave river after the front broke at Caporetto (now Kobarid) on the Isonzo (now Soca). In the Third War of Independence, the Italians, having previously made an alliance with Prussia against Austria (8.4.1866), lost both on land (Custoza) and by sea (Lissa). Prussia, however, prevailed, and the good offices of Napoleon III assured Italy of Venetia all the same. The Adige and Mincio are two rivers on the Po plain.

[2] In fact "The names of rivers, lakes and mountains are generally masculine. (...) Exceptions are, however, frequent due to old reasons, thus la (fem.) Piave (and in modern and local use) il (masc.) Piave." Alfredo Fansini Grammatica Italiana (Palermo, 1982 (1933)) pp. 34-5.

[3] Literally: "bad step".

[4] In Italian: "orrido", which means both gorge and horrible, fearful etc..

[5] friable — apt to crumble

[6] moraine — continuous line of debris left by a glacier

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Amadeo Bordiga. 1965

# Considerations on the party's organic activity when the general situation is historically unfavourable

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1. The so-called question of the party's internal organisation has always been a subject in the positions of traditional Marxists and of the present Communist Left, born as an opposition to the errors of the Moscow International. Naturally, such a topic is not to be isolated in a watertight compartment, but is instead inseparable from the general framework of our positions.
2. What is part of the doctrine, of the party's general theory, can be found in the classical texts; it is also exhaustively summarised in more recent works, in Italian texts such as the Rome and Lyon theses, and in many others with which the Left made known its prediction of the Third International's ruin; the phenomena the latter demonstrated were no smaller in seriousness than those related to the Second International. Such literature is still partly being used now in the study on organisation (meant in its narrow sense as party organisation and not in the broad sense of proletarian organisation, in its varying historical and social forms) and we are not trying to summarise it here, referring the reader to the above mentioned texts and to the vast work in progress of the "Storia della Sinistra", of which the second volume is being prepared.
3. Anything concerning the party's ideology and nature, being common to us all and beyond dispute, is left to pure theory; and the same goes for the relations between the party and its own proletarian class, that can be condensed to the obvious inference that only with the party and with party action the proletariat becomes a class for itself and for the revolution.
4. We are used to call questions of tactics – though we repeat that autonomous chapters or sections do not exist - those historically arising and going on in the relations between the proletariat and other classes; between the proletarian party and other proletarian organisations; and between the party and other bourgeois and non-proletarian parties.
5. The relation existing between the tactical solutions, such as not to be condemned by the doctrinal and theoretical principles, and the varied development of situations, objective and – in a sense – external to the party, is undoubtedly very changeable; but the Left has asserted that the party must dominate and foresee such relations, as is developed in the Rome theses on tactics meant as a project of theses for international tactics.

There are, synthesising to the extreme, periods of objective favourable conditions, together with unfavourable conditions of the party as subject; there may be the opposite case; and there

have been rare but suggestive examples of a well prepared party and of a social situation with the masses thrown towards revolution; and towards the party which foresaw and described it in advance, as Lenin vindicated for Russia's Bolsheviks.

6. By avoiding pedantic distinctions, we may wonder in which objective situation is today's society. Certainly the answer is that it is the worst possible situation, and that a large part of proletariat is controlled by parties – hired by the bourgeoisie – that prevent the proletariat itself from any classist revolutionary movement; which is even worse than direct crushing by the bourgeoisie. It is not therefore possible to foresee how long it will take before – in this dead and shapeless situation – what we already termed as "polarisation" or "ionisation" of social molecules, takes place, preceding the outburst of the great class antagonism.

7. What are, in this unfavourable period, the consequences for the party's internal organic dynamics? We always said, in all the above mentioned texts, that the party cannot avoid being influenced by the character of the real situation surrounding it. Therefore the big existing proletarian parties are – necessarily and avowedly – opportunist.

It is a fundamental thesis of the Left, that our party must not abstain from resisting in such a situation; it must instead survive and hand down the flame, along the historical "thread of time". It will be a small party, not owing to our will or choice, but because of ineluctable necessity. While thinking of the structure of this party, even in the IIIrd International's epoch of decadence, and in countless polemics, we rejected – with arguments that it is now unnecessary to recall – several accusations. We don't want a secret sect or élite party, refusing any contact with the outside, owing to a purity mania. We reject any formula of workerist or labourist party excluding all non-proletarians; as it is a formula belonging to all historical opportunists. We don't want to reduce the party to an organisation of a cultural, intellectual and scholastic type, as from polemics more than half a century old; neither do we believe, as certain anarchists and blanquists do, that a party is imaginable which is involved in conspiratorial armed action and in hatching plots.

8. Being the opposite of the social complex concentrated on falsification and destruction of theory and sound doctrine, it is evident that today's small party has, as an outstanding character, the duty of restoring the principles of doctrinal value; but it is unfortunately deprived of the favourable setting that saw Lenin achieving such a work after the disaster of the First World War. But it does not imply that we have to erect a barrier between theory and practical action; because beyond a given limit we would destroy ourselves and all our basic principles. We thus claim all forms of activity peculiar to the favourable periods, insofar as the real force relations render it possible .

9. All this should be treated much more broadly, but it is still possible to achieve a conclusion about the party's organisational structure in such a difficult transition. It would be a fatal error to

consider the party as dividable into two groups, one of which is dedicated to the study and the other to action; such a distinction is deadly for the body of the party, as well as for the individual militant. The meaning of unitarism and of organic centralism is that the party develops inside itself the organs suited to the various functions, which we call propaganda, proselytism, proletarian organisation, union work, etc., up to tomorrow, the armed organisation; but nothing can be inferred from the number of comrades destined for such functions, as on principle no comrade must be left out of any of them.

The fact that in this phase the comrades devoted to theory and to the movement's history may seem too many, and too few those yet ready to action, is a historical accident. But above all it would be senseless to carry out an investigation into the number of those devoted to the one and to the other display of energy. We all know that, when the situation radicalises, countless elements will side with us, in an immediate, instinctive way, and without the least training course aping scholastic qualifications.

10. We know very well that the opportunist danger, ever since Marx fought against Bakunin, Proudhon, Lassalle, and during all the further phases of the opportunist disease, has always been tied to the influence on the proletariat of petty-bourgeois false allies. Our infinite diffidence towards the contribution of these social strata cannot, and must not, prevent us from utilising – according to history's mighty lessons - exceptional elements coming from them; the party will destine such elements to the work of setting the theory to order; the lack of such a work would only mean death, while in the future its plan of propagation will have to identify it with the immense extension of revolutionary masses.

11. The violent sparks that flashed between the reophores [???] of our dialectics instructed us that a comrade, communist and revolutionary militant is one who has been able to forget, to renege on, to tear away from his mind and from his heart the classification in which he has been enrolled by the Register of this putrescent society; one who sees and mingles himself in the whole of the millenary space that binds the ancestral, tribal man, fighter against wild beasts, with the member of the future community, fraternal in the joyous harmony of social man.

12. Historical party and formal party.

This distinction is in Marx and Engels and they were right to deduce from it that, being through their work in the line of the historical party, they disdained to be members of any formal party. But no one of today's militants can infer from it he has the right to a choice: that is of being clearly with the "historical party", and to care nothing about the formal party. Thus it is, owing to the sound intelligence of that proposition of Marx and Engels, which has a dialectical and historical sense - and not because they were supermen of a very special type of race.

Marx says: party in its historical meaning, in the historical sense, and formal, or ephemeral, party. In the first concept lies the continuity, and from it we have derived our characteristic



thesis of the invariance of doctrine since its formulation by Marx; not as the invention of a genius, but as the discovery of a result of human evolution. But the two concepts are not metaphysically opposite, and it would be silly to express them by the poor doctrine : I turn my back on the formal party, as I go towards the historical one.

When from the invariant doctrine we draw the conclusion that the revolutionary victory of the working class can only be achieved with the class party and its dictatorship; when, on the basis of Marx's words we maintain that without a revolutionary and communist party, the proletariat may be a class for bourgeois science, but it is not for us and Marx himself; then the conclusion to be deduced is that, in order to achieve victory, it will be necessary to have a party, worthy at the same time of both characteristics, those of historical party and formal party, i.e. to have solved in the reality of action and history the apparent contradiction – that dominated a long and difficult past – between historical party, then as far as the content (historical, invariant programme) is concerned, and contingent party, that is relating to the form, operating as a force and a physical praxis of a decisive part of the struggling proletariat.

This synthetic clarification of the doctrinal question must also be quickly related to the historical transitions lying behind us.

13. The first transition from a body of small groups and leagues – which the workers' struggle came out of – to the International party foreseen by doctrine, takes place when the 1st International is founded in 1864. There is no point now in reconstructing the process leading to the crisis of such an organisation, that under Marx's direction was defended to the last from infiltration of petty-bourgeois programmes such as those of libertarians.

In 1889 the IInd International is built, after Marx's death, but under Engels' control, though his directions are not followed. For a moment there is the tendency to have again in the formal party the continuation of the historical one, but all that is broken up in the following years by the federalist and non-centralist type of party; by the influences of parliamentary practice and by the cult of democracy; by the nationalist outlook on individual sections, no longer conceived as armies at war against their own state – as was wanted by the 1848 Manifesto; open revisionism rises up disparaging the historical end and exalting the contingent and formal movement.

The rise of the IIIrd International, after the 1914 disastrous failure of almost all sections into pure democratism and nationalism, was seen by us – in the first years after 1919 – as the complete reconnection of historical party and formal party. The new International arose declaredly centralist and anti-democratic, but the historical praxis of the entrance into it of the sections federated in the failed International was particularly difficult, and made in too much of a hurry by the expectation that the transition, from the seizure of power in Russia to that in other European countries, would be immediate.

If the section that in Italy rose from the ruins of the old party of IInd International, was

particularly inclined – not certainly by virtue of persons, but because of its historical origins – to feel the necessity of welding together the historical movement and its present form, that was due to the hard struggles it waged against the degenerated forms, and to the refusal of infiltrations; which were not only attempted by those forces dominated by nationalist, parliamentary and democratic type positions, but also by those (in Italy, maximalism) influenced by anarcho-syndicalist, petty- bourgeois revolutionarism. Such left-wing current fought particularly in order to have more rigid conditions of admissions (construction of the new formal structure), completely put them into effect in Italy, and it was the first to realise the danger for the whole International, when they gave faulty results in France, Germany, etc.

The historical situation, in which the proletarian State was only formed in one country, while in the others the conquest of power had not been achieved, made difficult the clear organic solution of leaving in the hands of the Russian section the helm of the world organisation.

The Left was the first to realise that, whenever the behaviour of the Russian State would start showing signs of deviations – both in internal economy and in international relations – a discrepancy would take place between the politics of the historical party, i.e. of all revolutionary communists of the world, and that of a formal party defending the interests of the contingent Russian State.

14. Such an abyss has since then been fallen into that the "apparent" sections, depending on the Russian leader- party, are carrying out, in the ephemeral sense, a vulgar policy of collaboration with the bourgeoisie, no better than the traditional one of the corrupted parties of the IInd International.

The above enables, and entitles, the groups that come from the struggle of the Italian Left against Moscow's degeneration, to understand better than anyone else on which path the true, active (and therefore formal) party can keep itself faithful to the characters of the revolutionary, historical party; that potentially exists at least since 1847, which, from a practical point of view, proved itself in great historical events, through the tragic series of the revolution's defeats.

The transmission of this undeformed tradition, to the efforts made to create, without historical pauses, a new international party organisation cannot be organisationally based on the choice of men, though very qualified or well informed of the historical doctrine. Organically speaking, such transmission can only utilise, in the most faithful way, the line linking the action of the group through which the above mentioned tradition revealed itself 40 years ago, to the present line. The new movement cannot wait for supermen, nor have Messiahs, it must be founded on the revival of what could be preserved for a long time; but preservation cannot be restricted to the teaching of theses and to the search for documents, it uses living instruments in order to form an old guard and to hand over – uncorruptedly and potently – to a young guard. The latter rushes off towards new revolutions, that might have to wait not more than a decade from now

the action on the foreground of the historical scene; the party and the revolution having no concern at all for the names of the former and the latter.

The correct transmission of that tradition beyond generations – and also for this beyond names of dead or living men – cannot be restricted to that of critical texts, nor only to the method of utilising the communist party's doctrine by being close and faithful to classical texts; it must be related to the class battle that the Marxist Left – we don't want to limit the revival only to the Italian region – set out and carried out in the most inflamed real struggle during the years after 1919, and that was broken, more than by the relations of force with respect to the enemy class, by the dependence on the centre, the centre of the historical world party degenerating to that of an ephemeral party, destroyed by opportunist pathology, until such dependence was, historically and de facto, broken.

The Left historically tried, without breaking from the principle of world centralised discipline, to give revolutionary battle – although defensive – while keeping the vanguard proletariat intact from any collusion with the middle classes, their parties and their doomed-to- defeat ideologies. Having even the historical chance of saving, if not the revolution, at least the core of its historical party, being missed, it has today begun all over again, in a torpid and indifferent objective situation, within a proletariat infected to the bone by petty-bourgeois democratism. But the dawning organism, by utilising the whole of the doctrinal and praxis-based tradition – as confirmed by the historical verification of timely expectations – puts it into effect also with its everyday action; it pursues the aim of re-establishing an always wider contact with the exploited masses, and it eliminates from its structure one of the starting errors of the Moscow International, by getting rid of democratic centralism and of any voting mechanism, as well as every last member eliminating from his ideology any concession to democratoid, pacifist, autonomist or libertarian trends.

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